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# The organization and structure of the governmental relations function in community colleges: A case study at five Texas community colleges

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The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community

Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges

by

Steven E. Johnson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

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The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community  
Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges

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University of Nebraska, 2015

Adviser: Brent Cejda

Governmental relations, how institutions of higher education interact with appointed and elected governmental officials, has not been well defined or widely researched. This is especially the case at community colleges. Today, community colleges enroll half of all students in the United States in higher education and have become the largest sector of higher education in Texas (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2014). The need for community colleges to understand and to influence policy and funding decisions through governmental relations has intensified as Texas has faced pressure on state revenue as a result of two economic recessions over the past decade.

To understand how Texas community colleges structure and organize the function of governmental relations (GR) this study focused on five community colleges in the state of Texas. This effort follows closely Brown's (1985) notion of clarifying governmental relations efforts at various institutions of higher education and Birnbaum's (1988) model of a cybernetic institution. This research utilized a qualitative, multiple case methods strategy by interviewing leaders at five community colleges regarding the structure and organization of the governmental relations. The interviews were conducted with the college CEOs, other senior administrators (whose duties include governmental

relations), and governing board members at the five case study institutions. Additional data were also reviewed.

This study demonstrated that responsibility for governmental relations at community colleges rests with the institution's CEO. A key finding of this study is that there are differences in how colleges structure the governmental relations function based on institutional enrollment size. The researcher found three common themes: (1) the college CEO has ultimate responsibility for governmental relations, (2) the colleges structure their governmental relations efforts as a conduit of inputs/outputs between the institution and the external policy environment, and (3) the essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political systems. Future research across a broader range of community college leaders and institutions is needed to reinforce the findings of this study.

## Dedication

Dedicated with love and gratitude to my ever supportive, ever encouraging parents:

Jane and Rodney Johnson

And most importantly, to the two North Stars of my life...who always guide me home:

My wife Jennifer Reese and my son Samuel Johnson

Without you both, none of this would have been possible

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Governmental relations, how institutions of higher education interact with appointed and elected governmental officials, has not been well defined or widely researched (Grove & Solomon, 1968; Murray, 1976; Ferrin, 2003; McLendon, 2003; McLendon & Hearn, 2003; Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2003; Tandberg, 2006, 2010). Johnson (1981) stressed the development of comprehensive government relations systems in higher education by noting:

Of all the components listed under the umbrella term “institutional advancement,” government relations is the least understood. For most academics, the art of relating the college or university to the political process is a mystery; even worse, it is a mission they view with scorn (pg. 1).

Attempts to define and study governmental relations in higher education have been focused primarily from the perspective of four-year institutions (Grove & Carpenter, 1977; Murphy, 2001; Ferrin, 2003, 2005).

Not only is governmental relations in higher education often misunderstood, leaders of institutions of higher education have historically held the view that universities and colleges should be kept out of politics (Grove & Solomon, 1968). The notion that the lobbying function at institutions of higher education is viewed as distasteful is less prevalent in the reality of today’s political and policy environment (Cook, 1998). Institutions of higher education, including community colleges, have seen significant growth in both student enrollments and overall institutional budgets, which has given rise to the expectation of consistent interaction with the political and policy environments. (Angel, 1980; Parsons, 1997,1999, 2004).

Community colleges now enroll half of all students in the United States and have become the largest sector of higher education in Texas, enrolling nearly 52% of all students in public higher education in the state (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2014). Over the past decade enrollment at Texas community colleges has increased by 29%, as the state's colleges enrolled an additional 157,774 students (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Currently, the state contains 50 community college districts serving nearly the entirety of the state's geographic area through statutorily created "service areas." Students and their families understand the necessity of post-secondary education as a means of success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and community colleges play an important role in meeting their need for access to higher education opportunities (Immerwahr, 2002, 2004; Immerwahr, et al, 2019).

The 50 community college districts in Texas vary from rural single-campus districts with enrollments of less than 2000 students to large urban multi-campus districts with more than 80,000 students enrolled in credit bearing classes. Each district is governed by a locally elected board that set policy and employ a college CEO to manage institutional operations. These public institutions were created in state statute, receive state formula funding and state subsidies for college employee benefits, and are subject to both legislative and executive branch oversight. Public institutions of higher education must interact with the policy and political environments in an effort to monitor policy changes that might affect institutions, advocate for funding needs, and to supply information and messages back to the external environment (Parsons 1999, 2004). This environment includes both the state and national policy arenas, where board members and administrators must interact with elected and appointed officials in order to monitor and

influence policy decisions (Ferrin, 2003; McLendon, 2003; McLendon & Hearn, 2003; Murray, 1976). These lobbying efforts have been noteworthy at the federal level, yet may be somewhat muted since financial support by the federal government (excluding student Pell Grants) for community colleges in Texas accounts for less than 10% of total operating revenue for these institutions (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

The need for community college administrators and leaders to understand and to influence policy decisions in the state legislative environment has been intensified as Texas has faced pressure on state revenue as a result of two economic recessions over the past decade. The Texas Legislative Budget Board (2004, 2012) pointed to an overall increase in state general revenue from \$58.894 billion during the 2004-2005 biennium to \$94.977 billion for the current 2014-2015 biennium. This is an increase of 38% in state general revenue over the time period. However, during the same period the total state budget grew by 42%, reaching \$200.421 billion for the 2014-15 biennium. Consequently, the share of the total state budget funded by general revenue has declined by 3% over the past decade and now accounts for only 47% of the total budget.

During the decade of 2000-2010, in which general revenue of the state did not grow at the same rate as the overall budget, the population of Texas increased 21% (United States Census Bureau, 2010 Census). Adding to the pressure felt by state budget writers has been the growth in Medicaid costs (Texas State Comptroller, 2011) and the enrollment increases in the public school system (Texas Education Agency, 2012). During the decade of 2000-2010, the state Legislative Budget Board (2002, 2012) indicated that state spending on Medicaid grew by 54%, while state spending on the

public school system during the same time frame increased by 58%. The costs associated with these two budget drivers accounted for nearly two-thirds the total state budget (Legislative Budget Board, 2012). During this decade of rapid growth in Medicaid and public education spending, overall state spending for public universities and community colleges formulas grew by only 6%, while the state general revenue portion for these institutions actually declined by 9.5% (Legislative Budget Board, 2002, 2012).

Community colleges in Texas have faced consistent and significant reductions in funding from the state government for the past several Texas Legislative sessions. The decline in funding can be seen in the share of community college total revenue coming from state government, which has fallen from 44% in 2000 to 25% in 2014 (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2014). The state's retreat from direct support to community colleges can also be seen in the deterioration of the formula funding as the per contact hour rate has fallen by 27.5% - dropping from \$3.83 per contact hour in 2002 to \$2.78 per contact hour in 2012 (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Texas state lawmakers seem to have determined that it is more politically feasible to fund increases in parts of the state budget other than higher education including the fast growing community college sector. Texas community colleges, given their reliance upon state subsidies through direct government appropriations, were especially hard hit by this decline in state funding (Hudson, 2008; Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Public supported community colleges compete against the state's other budget priorities and multiple state agencies (e.g. public education, health and human services, transportation, etc.), thus creating a competitive environment in which achieving

legislative goals can be difficult and complex (Hovey, 1999; Kane & Orzag, 2003; Zumeta, 2004). A similar pattern can be seen in Texas as community colleges have faced reductions in state financial support and historic increases in enrollments (Legislative Budget Board, 2012; Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Because of these circumstances, community college administrators in Texas have engaged in behavior that seeks to inform and influence those with political power for purposes of advancing their respective institutional agendas (Dallas County Community College, 2015; Austin Community College, 2015; Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

Although the terms “governmental relations” and “lobbying” are often used synonymously, it is important to be clear that state agencies in Texas and state supported universities are prohibited from lobbying the state Legislature. What is less evident is the legal status of community colleges in Texas as it relates to state statutory limitations on lobbying by agencies. The Texas Government Code provides a clear and direct policy that state agencies may not engage in influential or lobbying type behavior. The Texas Government Code states:

Texas Government Code section 556.006 Legislative Lobbying:

- (a) A state agency may not use appropriated money to attempt to influence the passage or defeat of a legislative measure.
- (b) This section does not prohibit a state officer or employee from using state resources to provide public information or to provide information responsive to request. (Texas Government Code 2012)

It is critical to note the distinction in the above language in that state government agencies must seek to refrain from influence and rather simply provide information when interacting with state lawmakers. Public universities in Texas are considered agencies of

the state government, and thus must comply with this statutory requirement and consequently only provide information to legislators concerning public policy issues (Garcia, 1995). What is less clear is the status of the state's community colleges since they are considered hybrid entities of government owing to the fact that they are referenced in state statute as both state agencies and local units of government.

In order to conduct ongoing communication with the policy and political environments, institutions of higher education construct subsystems to monitor and interact with these external entities (Birnbaum, 1988). The ways in which community colleges organize and perform the governmental relations function has not been extensively studied. The limited research done in connection to the lobbying or governmental relations at institutions of higher education has examined the lobbying function primarily at universities and four-year colleges (Murray, 1976; Lesse, 1983; Browne, 1985; Krepel and Grady, 1989; Garcia, 1995; Cook, 1998; Ferrin, 2003; Thelin, 2004; St. John and Parsons, 2004; Wolf, 2004; Brumfield 2007; Midgley 2010; Glade 2011), but there has been little such research conducted at two-year community colleges.

Much of the previous literature focused on comparisons between university governmental relations office structures and their relative success at acquiring public funding. One such study is Midgley's (2010) examination of one public university's efforts to receive state funding for two building projects that required appropriations beyond the state's normal formula support. Another example of such research is Krepel and Grady's (1989) description of one state land grant institution's efforts to recover lost state funding after an economic decline. Often other research efforts, such as Cook's (1998) examination of the "big six" higher education associations, have been framed only

in connection to the Federal government. However, it is not clearly understood how community colleges organize and perceive the critical task of interacting with members of the state legislature and legislative staff. Further, the structure of these institutional governmental relations subsystems, and their relationship to the larger organizational structure, has not been well defined.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

This study sought to understand how five Texas community colleges structure and carry out the function of governmental relations. This effort to comprehend the structure of this critical function follows closely to Brown's (1985) notion of clarifying governmental relations efforts at institutions of higher education (and who carries out these efforts) by seeking out institutional perceptions. By examining this function the researcher better understands how these critical public educational organizations seek to balance institutional goals with the pressures placed upon them by legislative and policy environments. Findings helped to frame how different sized community colleges systematize their interactions and communications with their external environments and external actors, as well as how they gather and provide information to internal sub-systems.

### ***Framework for the Study***

The process of qualitative research was described by Creswell (2007) "as flowing from philosophical assumptions, to world views and through a theoretical lens" (p. 37), with the lens being the manner in which the study is viewed from different contexts, including social, political, and historical contexts (p. 38). This study utilized a theoretical lens that emerges from the work of those who have developed an understanding for the

exchange of information through communications in a policy/political environment and the theory of open systems in higher education.

At its core, the process of governmental relations has been rooted in the act of lobbying elected officials and their staff to influence policy outcomes. The term lobbying is used in many ways, but for the purposes of this study the term lobbying is used to describe a communications process within a political/policy environment. Milbrath (1960) pointed out that decision-making in governmental settings has been viewed from several perspectives, such as the role of interest groups in influencing policy or the impact of power elites on these decisions. These varying perspectives are attempts to understand the complex nature of political policy making but he suggested an alternative notion of “lobbying” as a communications process in which those conducting the act of lobbying seek to provide information to a decision maker and attempt to create positive policies for an organization. Milbrath argued that, “communication is the only means of influencing or changing a perception; the lobbying process, therefore, is totally a communication process” (p. 32).

In contrast, Brown (1985) presented a perspective on lobbying tactics as varying given differing contextual factors. The act of lobbying is viewed by Brown as, “the activity of group representatives in attempting to influence” (p. 466), but the particular manner in which lobbying is carried out depends on the norms in a particular state. This insight is important because to clearly understand lobbying at the state level, researchers must strive to appreciate the variance in state political traditions and what policymakers expect from those seeking to influence the process. As Brown (1985) argued, “differing styles of lobbying and interaction emerge which are supported by state-specific

definitions, or norms, about appropriate relationships between lobbyists and policymakers” (p. 466).

General systems theory has defined organizations in terms of any entity, which consists of a coherent whole that has two or more parts and is separated from its external environment by a boundary (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Inputs and outputs cross this boundary and the focus of the system is on the complex interplay of these interactions (von Bertalanffy, 1956). Open systems theory, as defined by Katz and Kahn (1978), has emphasized the relationship between an organization and its external environment. In this view the boundary is permeable and interactions of many kinds often occur between the environment and the system’s components. This focus reflects an organization’s ability and skillfulness to adapt to changes in the environmental conditions

Community colleges can be described as open systems, which endeavor to be responsive to the needs of the communities that they serve. In other words, community colleges are often called on to change and to meet different needs depending on demands from their respective constituencies—including local, state, and federal governments. Social values, as well as political and legal limitations, are significant elements of the environment that influence the community college as an open organization and its multiple missions (Katz and Kahn, 1978).

Birnbaum (1988) posited a theoretical model of an open social system he termed the cybernetic institution. This model of a higher education institution facilitates an understanding of the interplay between an institution’s mission, its stakeholders’ needs, and its political aptitude. The cybernetic controls suggested by Birnbaum are “self-correcting mechanisms that monitor organizational functions and provide attention cues,

or negative feedback, to participants when things are not going well” (p. 179). Birnbaum’s cybernetic institution has many goals but a key concern is to limit uncertainty. As he argued, “uncertainty is discomfoting, and decision makers in cybernetic institutions simplify (and consequently distort) their perceptions of the environment and operations of the colleges in order to make tolerable the cognitive requirements to understand them” (p. 184). This study used the concepts of open systems theory, the cybernetic institution model, and lobbying as a communications process as lenses through which to view the structure and operations of the governmental relations function at community colleges.

### ***Methodology***

Qualitative research takes an exploratory approach to identifying a problem, keeps literature review at a minimum, has a broad perspective of purpose, data collection is from a small number of individuals, and the qualitative researcher looks for the larger meanings of findings (Creswell, 2005). The qualitative approach to research is an inquiry approach conducted in a subjective and biased manner by design. The characteristic of subjectivity in qualitative research is valued because, according to Hatch (2002), data collected are not significant until they are “processed by the human intelligence of the researcher” (p.7). Creswell (2007) explained that the methodology of qualitative research is “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (p. 19). Because the qualitative researcher spends long periods of time with the cases and is able to bring his or her own experiences into analyzing the data, the subjectivity allows the researcher to interpret and report the data with “an increasingly detailed knowledge of the topic being studied” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19).

Stake (1995) pointed to both participant interviews and document examination as valid data strategies when utilizing a case study methodology. This research utilized a qualitative methods strategy by interviewing leaders at five Texas community colleges regarding the structure, organization, and functioning of the governmental relations function at each college district. The interviews were conducted with the college CEOs, other senior administrators (whose duties include governmental relations), and governing board members at the five case study institutions.

Participants for this study were purposefully selected for the knowledge and insight into the governmental relations function at community colleges in Texas. Brown (1985) examined the role and function of lobbying in higher education by dividing institutions based upon the Carnegie Foundations classification of institutions. This study examined five institutions in Texas that fall into the public-two year classification. Further the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board created four peer groupings for the statewide accountability system in Texas based on student enrollment size: Very large peer group (10 largest colleges); Large peer group (8 colleges); Medium peer group (23 colleges); and Small peer group (9 colleges). In 2007, the state Coordinating Board formally assigned each community college to the peer groups. The assignment was intended to increase peer group knowledge, encourage the use of accountability data, and to enhance peer group interaction and collaboration (THECB, 2013). The five colleges in this study were selected based on their membership in each of these categories, with two being selected from the “very large” peer group as away of capturing institutions that serve the largest number of students.

To accomplish the purpose of the study, and develop a larger meaning of the governmental relations function at community colleges, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews for this research were conducted in a semi-structured manner encouraging participants to provide insight with questions serving as a framework. Additional probing questions were used as needed to gain further insight and context. The researcher also conducted document reviews as a way to triangulate and validate data from the interviews. College organizational charts were reviewed and institutional Websites were examined for information related to governmental relations.

### ***Research Questions***

Creswell (2007) advised condensing a study to “a single, overarching question and several sub questions,” (p. 108) with the overarching question, which is often labeled the “central question” (pp. 107-108), being the most comprehensive question the researcher can ask about the problem being researched. Understanding an institutional organizational structure, in the context of this study, means describing where in the institution’s organizational hierarchy the governmental relations function is situated and who has primary responsibilities to carry out the lobbying activities. The term “college leaders” is used in this study to mean community college presidents/chancellors, elected members of the boards of trustees, and administrators whose duties include governmental relations. The following central question guided this study: “How do community colleges across four peer groups structure the organizational function known as governmental relations and how do college leaders describe the operations of this function?” Additional questions that will provide supporting information and context for answering the central question were as follows:

- Research Question 1- How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?
- Research Question 2 - How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants' descriptions of how their community college structures the function?
- Research Question 3 - Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?
- Research Question 4 - How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?
- Research Question 5 - Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?

### ***Definitions***

Lobbying Activities – College staff, administrators, or Trustees interacting with legislators, other policymakers, or staff for the purposes of responding to requests and advancing institutional agendas. Activities as defined for this study will encompass all contacts made (e.g. visits, official testimony, telephone calls, letters, email, special event invitations).

Biennial Session - The Texas Legislature convenes in session for 140 days every odd-numbered year.

College Board of Trustees - POWERS AND DUTIES. The board of trustees of junior college districts shall be governed in the establishment, management and control of the

junior college by the general law governing the establishment, management and control of independent school districts insofar as the general law is applicable. (Texas Education Code, § 130.084)

Governmental Relations – The process of an organization seeking to provide information in an effort to impact and/or influence the policy making process.

Influence - To affect, direct, or re-direct public policy through the legislative process.

Lobbying - The act of a person, or group of persons, seeking to communicate their views on an issue to elected or appointed government officials, as well as members of their staff.

### ***Delimitations***

This study examines the governmental relations function at five community colleges within the state of Texas. This may make it impossible to generalize any findings to other community colleges in other states. Although differently sized and geographically located community colleges will be studied conclusions may be limited due to the choice of representative colleges.

### ***Limitations***

Creswell (2007) argued that using a multiple case study approach as opposed to a single case study method may dilute the overall analysis; however, for the purposes of this study a multiple case study approach was chosen in an effort to make cross-case comparisons. This case study is also time-bound and given a different set of circumstances the results might be different. Additionally, the researcher served as sole investigator in this multiple case study and may introduce some level of bias. Further the fact that the researcher is directly involved in governmental relations efforts through the

statewide community college association may introduce some level of bias due to the closeness of the investigator to the issues and institutions being researched.

### ***Significance of the Study***

This study is focused on understanding how community colleges structure and comprehend the function of governmental relations. Meaningful research has been produced in connection to the lobbying or governmental relations function at universities and four-year colleges, but there is little such research on the same function at two-year community colleges. By focusing on how these two-year institutions perceive and describe subsystems, which serve to monitor and interact with their external policy environments, this study adds to the knowledge base of higher education governmental relations. The results of this study adds to the body of literature but will also be of significance to community college presidents and chancellors, college trustees, and governmental relations professionals as they seek to understand how this important function is structured and understood at these critical institutions.

Additionally, this study examined any variations between varying types of community colleges to understand if they have developed differing structures and organizations for the governmental relations function. There is very little research that scrutinizes differentiation between community college governmental relations substructures based on institutional size. This study helps to provide a more textured understanding of such differences. Finally, this research effort strives to view the governmental relations efforts by five different community colleges through the lens of the systems theory – specifically the cybernetic institution as proposed by Birnbaum (1988). Using the model of the cybernetic institution provides a frame to examine this

function by placing governmental relations in the context of mediator between the college system and the external policy/political environment.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### *Introduction*

According to Machi and McEvoy (2009), the literature review “is a written document that presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study” (p. 4). Merriam (1998), suggested that the literature review “integrates, synthesizes, and critiques the important thinking and research on a particular topic” in order to situate it “in the knowledge base of the field” (p. 55). This review of the literature is divided into four parts based upon themes. It will consider research related to 1.) open systems theory, including the cybernetic institution of higher education model; 2.) perceptions of the role of higher education in society and the funding of higher education; 3.) models and definitions of the lobbying process; and 4.) the governmental relations function at institutions of higher education.

The first section reviews the research related to open systems theory. Specifically, a review of the research related to systems theory as it applies to institutions of higher education will be provided. Works that seek to understand and frame such institutions, as systems comprised of subsystems working to minimize uncertainty are examined. Particularly the theory of institutions of higher education as cybernetic organizations that seek to monitor and reduce uncertainty are considered. The research related to the role of higher education in society and the public perception of higher education in the United States is examined. The second section is an evaluation of the research of the funding of higher education, and specifically that of community colleges is reviewed.

The third section reviewed efforts to explain the activity of lobbying and provides definitions. Studies that focus on lobbying as a communications activity are reviewed and contrasted with those that emphasize the situational nature of lobbying. These studies attempt to provide an understanding of what activities constitute the act of lobbying. The fourth section reviewed the research focusing on the governmental relations function in higher education. Studies that strive to understand the governmental relations function in higher education institutions in general are examined. Lastly, a summary of the themes reviewed in this chapter and how they relate to the research in this study is discussed.

### ***Systems Theory and Community Colleges***

The concept of organizations as systems can be traced back to the work of von Bertalanffy (1956, 1968) and Boulding (1956) who both proposed the framework of social organizations as open systems. These open systems are distinct creations that interact with their external environment. In a sense, the concept proposed by von Bertalanffy is that of the organization as an organism in a biological sense. Morgan (2006) asserted that our perceptions and mental constructions of organizations are comprised of metaphors. Historically, the most common metaphor used to describe an organization was that of a machine; however, Morgan pointed out that open systems theory proposes a metaphor based on that of living organisms. Open systems theory views an organization as a coherent system consisting of internal subsystems, which are separated from the surrounding external environment by a boundary (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1976; Senge, 1990). Systems are hierarchical in that they are comprised of smaller systems, which are in turn part of larger systems (Birnbaum, 1988). Key to understanding the structure of systems is to appreciate

that moving across this boundary are inputs from the environment to the system and outputs flowing from the system to the external environment (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968; Katz & Kahn, 1978). It is this flow across a boundary which is essential to the open systems understanding of the interactions between the organization and the external environment. Scott (2008) suggested that open systems theory of organizations emphasizes the significance of the environment as it constrains, shapes, permeates, and renews the organization.

The relative ease with which inputs and outputs are able to cross this boundary is a measure of how “open or closed a system” may be to its external environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Open systems theory not only concentrates on these interactions to understand a system, but also places emphasis on the system’s ability to adapt to changes in the external environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Senge, 1990; Morgan, 2006). Bolman and Deal (2008) argued that, “organizations are open systems dealing with a changing, challenging, and erratic environment” (p.31). Closed systems have somewhat rigid boundaries that limit the interactions that can occur with the external environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978). If a system’s relative openness is a measure of how it interacts with the external world, then how tightly or loosely coupled it may be is a means to understand the systems internal connections (Weick, 1976; Birnbaum, 1988). This study uses the term “coupling” to indicate how the connections between an organization’s subsystems are structured – whether they are frequent, important, and responsive (Birnbaum, 1998).

Systems theory has been used as conceptual frameworks to study higher education institutions including community colleges (Birnbaum, 1988; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Levin, 1994,1997; Cain, 1999; Fairchilds, 2001). Cain (1999) argued that

community colleges are systems, which have lost the core of their mission and purpose as they have endeavored to become open, and willing to be all things to all external and internal stakeholders. He attempted to take a methodical analysis of community colleges and emphasizes that they are more than simply the sum of their parts. By acknowledging the importance of systematic concepts like intra-organizational communication and its role in altering the perceptions, Cain argued that community colleges should revise their mission and become more focused and move beyond what he identified as a confused state. The weakness in Cain's effort lies in the fact that his unit of analysis are the traditional distinct organizational units which is what he sought to transcend and move beyond.

Levin (1998) argued that the community college is an entity in which institutional identity is "embedded in what it does in its actions and change processes." (pg. 2) He pointed out that just as living systems constantly change to adapt to their environments, organizational behaviors within systems, such as community colleges, are not static. Because they are systems, community colleges interact with a broader external set of systems and these can be seen in internal behaviors. He asserted that in connection to community colleges:

Thus the organization's responses to external stimuli, its adaptation to its environment, the behaviors of its members, and the social and political dynamic in and surrounding the institution are expressions of organization and efforts to not only maintain but also to reproduce its identity (p. 2).

Fairchild (2001) employed a systems model of organizations to investigate the effects of community stakeholders on community college programs resulting from informal inputs. She utilized a framework in which it was assumed that, 1) community colleges are

comprehensive in mission and responsive to the needs of their communities, 2) that community stakeholders have some influence over college operations, and 3) operate interdependently with an external environment. The author examined three community colleges within one larger district and conducted onsite interviews focused on the role that external influence plays in organizational behavior. The findings centered on the lack of consensus, or agreement, by both internal and external stakeholders on how to define a community college.

Within a systems theory context, Berquist and Pawlak (2008) identified six distinct but interrelated leadership cultures at institutions of higher education in an effort to understand who directs and works in these organizations. They argued that these cultures provide a framework that allows administrators to interpret the world in which they work. The collegial culture emphasizes the interaction between administration and faculty to encourage rational planning and a focus on educational quality. The managerial culture highlights the drive to ensure quality daily operations through clear delineation of specific and measurable goals and purposes. The developmental culture focuses on the leadership that seeks to encourage openness within the organizations and the development of potential among all members of the institution. The advocacy culture seeks to bring together multiple constituencies in an effort to equitably allocate resources throughout the organization. Within the virtual culture administrators see the educational institution as open and driven to link student learning to new modes of learning and thinking. The tangible culture emphasizes the history and traditions of a particular institution and reinforces the need for values based and personal relationships (2008).

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) argued that these six cultures have a substantial impact on the ways in which administrators at institutions understand their work and more significantly on how they perceive organizational stability and sustainability. The authors contended that most administrators tend to adopt one of the cultures yet the other five are present in the organization and all interact with the prevailing culture at their institution. Further, Bergquist and Pawlak proposed that each culture has an opposite as a way of responding to the weakness and strengths of its opposite. They argued that the developmental culture opposes the collegial, the advocacy opposes the managerial, and the virtual opposes the tangible. It is the interaction among the six cultures in which shared meaning is created and the institutional anxiety (created by the inherent conflict between the cultures) can be contained.

Birnbaum (1998) used the systems frame to model institutions of higher education, their internal environments, and how they seek to monitor and interact with their external environments. He argued that the foremost goal of any organization (including institutions of higher education) is not simply decision making but rather to create a shared sense of the world and what is important to the organization. It is this sense making of the world that provides insights into organizational behavior. Birnbaum asserted, “we can understand a great deal about why institutions act as they do if we understand that they are responding to their perception of their environment” (pg. 42). This notion can be even more significant when the level of complexity of an external environment is taken in to account. Institutions that have consistent and less complex external environments tend to have internal structures and subunits that are uniform and

fewer in number. In contrast, institutions that exist within complex external environments will often have more internal subunits with more complexity (pg. 44).

As with Berquist and Pawlak (2008), Birnbaum (1998) identified models of organizational functioning or culture. In his book, Birnbaum named four models of institutions of higher education – collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical. The collegial institution focuses on consensus, consultative leadership, and shared responsibilities. Birnbaum created a fictional institution he called “Heritage College” to illustrate this model. At Heritage there is not a high level of hierarchy, rather the faculty and administration are seen as equals. The emphasis is on shared sense of the world by the members of the collegium and Heritage may be viewed by the broader environment as too slow and deliberate in coming to consensus in the decision making process. The bureaucratic institution is characterized by clearly defined goals and a deep and complex hierarchy which can be most clearly described within the context of that icon of all bureaucracies, the organizational chart.” (pg. 107). Birnbaum created the fictional “People’s Community College” to illustrate this organizational culture. The administrators and faculty at People’s Community College are driven by rules and regulations and identify with their written job descriptions.

The political institution is comprised of “a large number of individuals and groups that in some ways operate autonomously but in other ways remain interdependent” (pg. 132). Power in this model of an institution is diffused instead of concentrated and many different stakeholders have power within their spheres. Birnbaum’s fictional institution, created to represent the political institution, is “Regional State University (RSU).” The president at RSU is the most powerful individual on campus, yet cannot make significant

changes without negotiating a political power dynamic in which the various power brokers exert influence. The anarchical institution is represented by Birnbaum's "Flagship University." At Flagship the underlying dynamic is one of organized anarchy where decisions are in many ways created by the system yet no one intended them and no one truly directs or controls them. (pg. 153). Birnbaum's "organized anarchy" has three primary characteristics: problematic goals, an unclear technology, and fluid participation. (pg. 154). Because of these three characteristics it is very difficult to understand how Flagship University can truly work.

Birnbaum (1998) extended the systems theory model to create a new vision of institutions of higher education as cybernetic organizations. To illustrate this model of an institution, Birnbaum created the fictional "Huxley College." Within such organizations as Huxley, Birnbaum argued that stability of the system is accomplished through cybernetic controls, which he contended are "self-correcting mechanisms that monitor organizational functions and provide attention cues, or negative feedback, to participants when things are not going well" (pg. 179). This dynamic can be illustrated by thinking of a simple thermostat, which is self-correcting through a feedback loop. As Birnbaum explained, the thermostat turns "the furnace on when the environment's temperature falls below a preset limit (say 70 degrees) and turns it off when the temperature returns to the desired level" (pg. 181). So too Huxley has goals and constraints which must stay within an acceptable range.

Morgan (1986) argued that such systems use negative feedback to sense and remedy mistakes so that when the institution is moving in the wrong direction, something else automatically ensures action is taken to bring the system back on course. This

process of monitoring negative feedback is both internal to the organization and to the way in which it monitors the external environment. Further, Birnbaum argued that a chief function of a cybernetic institution is to limit uncertainty. He pointed out that, “uncertainty is discomfoting, and decision makers in cybernetic institutions simplify (and consequently distort) their perceptions of environment and the operations of the college in order to make tolerable the cognitive requirements to understand them.” (pg. 184).

Systems theory understands organizations as discreet systems that interact externally with their environment by receiving inputs and sending outputs across a boundary. Community colleges are systems and seek to interact with their broader external environments. This is especially important for these institutions given the multiple missions community colleges seek to fulfill (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Beach, 2011). Community colleges interact with their external environments through a variety of channels such as workforce boards and local business entities, primary and secondary education institutions, local and state policymakers, and university partners (Cohen & Brawer, 2002). These colleges also utilize cybernetic controls in that they respond to attention cues from the outside environment and seek to make adjustments to institutional behavior and direction based on these negative feedback loops. This study will utilize the lens of open systems theory, and in particular the concept of the cybernetic institution, to conceptualize and understand how the five community colleges structure and utilize the governmental relations function to monitor and respond to their external environments.

### ***Public Perceptions and Higher Education Funding***

America has seen a significant shift in the public's perception of higher education over the centuries. What began primarily as training centers for clergy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, higher education began to shift significantly in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Land Grant College Act of 1862 and the new emphasis on practical subjects for a growing industrial class (Veysey, 1965; Church & Sedlack, 1997; Thelin, 2004). A half-century later, the emphasis became research institutions based on the German university model. In the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the GI Bill of 1944, and the creation of the Pell Grant need-based student financial aid program in the 1970's, expanded the number of students entering a growing American higher education system (Geiger, 1997; Thelin, 2004). As this expansion took place, the relative role of higher education to increase both economic expansion and social mobility also increased (Thelin, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Carnevale (2010, 2012, 2013) argued that the higher education function of social mobility is even more important in today's economy, but is in fact becoming less effectual.

Americans still perceive the critical role higher education plays in social mobility (Immerwahr and Johnson, 2008) but Carnevale (2013) pointed out that, in fact, American higher education has become a mechanism that perpetuates the existing class structure. Carnevale argued that the American system of higher education is now a dual system of racially separate and unequally funded institutions. However, the system has evolved and the public continues to recognize that to obtain a higher wage job, and the corresponding pathway to the middle class, postsecondary credentials are necessary (Carnevale, 2012).

Community colleges have evolved and expanded over the decades to fill a gap in the higher education landscape. The number of missions of these institutions has grown as the number of institutions and students who attend them has also expanded (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Beach, 2011). Baily and Morest (2004) pointed out the portfolio of community college missions goes well beyond the traditional general education core or degree granting programs that historically lead to transfer or an occupational degree or certificate. Activities now include such things as developmental education, adult basic education, English as a second language, customized training for specific companies, preparation of students for industry certification exams, education and training for welfare recipients and others facing acute barriers to entering the workforce, non-credit instruction in a host of areas, and small business development (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Many have argued that the broad nature of today's community college is detrimental because doing so many things means not doing any one well. Some economists like Breneman and Nelson (1980) recommended that community colleges should limit their missions as a way of limiting financial and economic costs to society. Others such as Brint and Karabel (1989) and Beach (2011) have argued that the conflicting objectives of academic and vocational education reinforce class distinctions and heighten inequality.

The relative positive or negative public perceptions of higher education depend on a variety of factors (Brumfield & Miller, 2008). McLendon, Heller, and Young (2005) argued that both the relative technical nature of a policy and the public interest (or saliency) will often affect the politics associated with the policy. This notion would tend to reinforce the idea that relatively less complicated issues such as the funding of higher education would see higher levels of public interest, while more complex issues

concerning the regulation and accountability of institutions of higher education would see less saliency on the part of the public (Brumfield & Miller, 2008). This notion can help explain how Immerwahr (2002, 2004, 2006) found a high level of public interest around issues such as college affordability including tuition costs and student financial aid. Brumfield and Miller (2008) argued that the public's interest in the funding and redistributive policies surrounding higher education have stayed relatively stable over the past two decades. Immerwahr (2002, 2004, 2008) found that the public recognizes the need for the consistent funding of higher education and for these institutions to remain affordable and accessible.

State funding support for higher education has continued to decline over the past three decades as state budgets have felt pressure in the form of declining revenues due to significant economic recessions and pressures from other budget areas including Medicaid and K-12 funding (Hovey, 1999; Kane & Orzag, 2003; Smith, 2004; St. John & Parsons, 2004; Thelin, 2004; Johnstone, 2005; Zusman, 2005). Starting in the 1980's, states began to experience the issue of declining tax revenues (Hovey, 1999). The recession of the early 1980's, combined with those of 1991, 2001, and 2007 have forced states to grapple with how best to manage governmental programs with shrinking resources. It is critical to note that the declines experienced during, and after, the 2001 and 2007 recessions were more significant than previous recessions. The recessions in 1981, 1982, and 1991 all saw declines in real per capita state tax revenue of less than one percent, while the recession of 2001 was followed by declines in 2002 and 2003 of nearly eight percent and two percent respectively (Giertz & Giertz, 2004). States were faced with deterioration in revenues that had not been experienced in several generations.

According to Giertz and Giertz (2004) “the aggregate data suggest that the states were indeed hit with an unprecedented downturn in revenues—unlike anything that had been experienced in the preceding half-century” (p. 112).

The reduction in state funding for higher education can be traced, in many respects, to the competition for funds between the differing demands and components of state budgets. The majority of state governments must produce balanced budgets, which means increases in such programs as Medicaid involves corresponding reductions to some other competing element of the budget. According to Callan (2002), national data indicates that in 1987 Medicaid received slightly over ten percent of state expenditure and higher education received just over twelve percent, however by 1999 these figures reversed - nineteen percent for Medicaid and ten percent for higher education.

While true in all of higher education, this downward trend in state funding for higher education has been pronounced at the community college (Voorhees, 2001; Dowd & Grant, 2006). Voorhees (2001) pointed out that, although there were increases in total dollars for higher education from state appropriations from 1996 to 1999, community colleges did not realize increases in these aggregate amounts at the same rates as other sectors of higher education. Compounding the problem for community colleges has been that the timing of this weakening of state funding coincided with large growth in enrollments. According to Evelyn (2004), community colleges have seen a thirty-one percent increase in enrollment over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. This increase in the number of students served has not meant a corresponding proportionate increase in funding. All of higher education has grown but two-year institutions have seen the largest growth. While community colleges enrolled more than forty-eight percent of all

students in higher education in the mid-1990s, they only received thirty-five percent of total higher education appropriations (Voorhees, 2001). Kane (2003) pointed out that the total share of funding for all of higher education coming from the states has declined. However, Voorhees (2001) suggested that community colleges receive an increasingly smaller portion of that shrinking pool of state funding.

American higher education has grown over the centuries to play a critical role in economic growth and social mobility. Community colleges specifically have developed to fill many roles in the higher education system. Carnevale (2012) and others have pointed to increasing economic and social stratification within the higher education system. Public perception of higher education tends to be mostly focused on distributive and affordability concerns. The literature also indicates that public universities and colleges must compete with other policy areas to obtain adequate levels of state funding (Brumfield & Miller, 2008). Financial support from state governments assists in maintaining student affordability and works to improve the overall quality of education. In responding to these trends, higher education leaders are required to seek strategies that will send messages to political leaders supporting their institutions. This study seeks to understand how leaders at five community colleges seek to convey such messages to their political and community leaders.

### ***Interest Groups / Lobbying***

From the founding of the Republic interest groups have played a central role in American politics. The right to petition the government is contained in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. However, from the beginning of the nation there have been voices warning against the influence of factions that might act to pull apart the

nation. As the Constitutional Congress debated the proposed U.S. Constitution, James Madison in *Federalist 10* argued that interest groups (what he terms factions) could work to break apart the American Republic. However he makes the case that a large Republic would survive the threat of factions because of its size and the number of competing interests acting to make sure no one group could dominate. As the nation, and its political system developed, interest groups have organized and worked to impact (lobby) the political process (Milbrath, 1960; Berry, 1977; Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Leech, 1998, Baumgartner et al., 2009).

Much of the literature related to interest groups is centered on surveys or case studies of those involved in the process of advocating on behalf of specific interests, especially in the context of national politics in Washington, D.C. Milbrath (1960) conducted a survey of more than one hundred Washington lobbyists. His stated goal was to, "...build upon our general knowledge of decision making to construct a framework showing how lobbying fits into, or plays a role in, the over-all governmental decision process" (pg. 34). Key to Milbrath's concept of this framework is the communications process. He argues that to comprehensively understand the impact of lobbying on the political and policy process, one must examine all the variables that go into a particular decision-making process. This, Milbrath argued, is practically impossible but, "on the other hand, it can make some headway in analyzing the lobbying process by viewing it as a communication process" (pg. 52).

In a broader sense, other researchers have attempted to understand how the act of lobbying by interest groups fits into the policy formation and adoption process. Kingdon (1984) conducted a case study around the policy areas of healthcare (in the form of

HMOs or health maintenance organizations), national health insurance, transportation deregulation, and waterway user charges. Kingdon attempted to illustrate how the complex and chaotic world of public policymaking is actually comprised of patterns and regularities. His basic notion was that the policy process begins with an agenda, which he defined as, “ the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention to at any given time” (pg. 3). In essence, the setting of the agenda is the process of politics and for an issue to be on the agenda, three areas must come together: 1) a problem, 2) a set of alternatives or solutions, and 3) the political will or interest to address the problem. For Kingdon, those that lobby policy decision-makers are essential in assisting all three of these parts in coming together.

Baumgartner and Leech (1998) reviewed the literature on interest group theory from the 1940s forward and argued that scholars had begun by the 1970s to lose the focus on the impact of these groups on the process. They called for a more coherent set of research questions, focused on large-scale studies, and for researchers to pay more attention to the context of group behavior. Baumgartner et al. (2009) conducted a large-scale survey of lobbyists on ninety-eight policy issues at the Federal level during the last two years of the Clinton Administration and first two years of the Bush Administration. But rather than an analysis of lobbyists and their activities, the authors tracked how successful these actions were in reframing issues over two and four year time frames. Their findings centered on the notion that much of the political process, including lobbying, has little effect in changing policy because it is easier to support the status quo in a government of divided power than to move to a new policy.

Although much of the literature on interest groups and lobbying is focused at the national level, some researchers (Browne, 1985; Rosenthal, 1993; Nownes & Freeman, 1998) have looked to understand lobbying at the state level. Brown (1985) surveyed and interviewed lobbyists from twenty-six interest groups in four states. The results indicated that the behavior and acceptable activities varied based on the norms of political process in each state. Rosenthal provided an in depth look at lobbying in the states and argued that those that follow politics and policy making in state government must acknowledge that lobbyists are important to the legislative and political process. In their study of how interest groups operate at the state level, Nownes and Freeman (1998) examined lobbying techniques used by individuals and organizations. Using data from a survey of state lobbyists and organizations, they found that state interest group politics is analogous to Federal interest group politics.

The role of interest groups, and the activities of lobbyists, is integral in the political process of policy making. This study seeks to examine how community colleges, as interest groups, go about structuring and carrying out the governmental relations function at the state level. Clearly these institutions seek to not only monitor their environments but also to reframe and influence policy issues that affect them. Milbrath's (1960) conception of lobbying as a communications process complements the systems theory (cybernetic institution) lens through which this study attempts to understand these institutions and their lobbying efforts.

### ***Governmental Relations in Higher Education***

The use of governmental relations staff at institutions of higher education, and related associations, to lobby the policy process has been considered over the past

decades. Murray (1976) discussed the trend from the 1950s to the 1970s of the increasing role higher education plays in politics. As he argued “higher education has moved from the periphery of American politics to a position of a central participant and contestant for national resources” (pg.79). Murray sought to describe the newly important higher education lobby and to understand how the various higher education lobbies interact. He found that in 1976, institutions of higher education structured the lobby function in a decentralized manner that lead to ineffectual and somewhat feeble efforts. Cook (1998) examined the higher education lobby in Washington and found a much more integrated and effective effort centered around what she terms the “big six” higher education associations. The study surveyed and interviewed association lobby staff, as well as university and college presidents who were designated as the institution’s representative (pg. 10). Cook argued that, “there was once a time when the higher education community could stay above the Washington fray and fare well nonetheless” (pg. 201). But given the changes in the scope of institutions and federal policy around higher education she concluded that time has passed.

Institutions of higher education are not simply concerned with lobbying in Washington D.C. but in many respects they must focus on the state legislative environment primarily. Funding from the states, as well as regulation and accountability, demand that these institutions look to influence decisions made in statehouses (Thelin, 2004; St. John, et al. 2004). In order to accomplish institutional goals in the legislative environment, colleges and universities must create plans for legislative relations. Krepel and Grady (1989) examined the legislative plan at one comprehensive land grant university in a primarily agricultural state. The institution had suffered reductions in the

recent past because of economic decline in the state more broadly. The legislative plan was to be an effort to increase funding to the institution after suffering cuts over the past several funding cycles. The plan itself contained three primary elements: 1) media placement, 2) outreach, and 3) legislative relations. Krepel and Grady (1989) argued that such short-term legislative plans should be converted into ongoing long-term efforts. They called for institutions to practice continual environmental scanning and conduct year-round ongoing planning for legislative relations. Midgley (2010) conducted a case study analysis of one public university's efforts to receive state funding for two building projects that required appropriations beyond the state's normal formula support. His goal was to analyze how the institution designed and implemented such requests for funding through a conceptual framework based on aligning the requests with state goals and priorities. The study concluded that one effort was better aligned with the state's higher education goals and was therefore more easily communicated by university administrators, including university governmental relations staff.

The necessity for institutions to create and maintain a governmental relations function has increased over the years due to the growing complexity of an institution's external environments and the pressure to seek state support in the form of increased or, at a minimum, stable funding (Cook, 1998; Zusman, 2005; Brumfield & Miller, 2008). There has been meaningful research on how these offices are structured, the characteristics of those that staff the function, and the activities they engage in to achieve institutional goals. Brown (1985) conducted research seeking to understand the relationship between institutions of higher education and state government. This was achieved by studying the management and organizational structure of state level

governmental relations efforts at three different types of institutions – doctoral universities, comprehensive universities, and two-year colleges. The study consisted of a survey instrument sent to three hundred universities and colleges throughout the nation. Brown's effort was unique, and significant, in terms of examining lobbying efforts across types of institutions. Brown found that the professional governmental relations staff typically "occupied high level positions in the organizational structure and tended to have additional responsibilities" (pg. 88). These factors tended to be consistent across the three types of institutions. The study concluded that the type of institution dictated how the governmental relations efforts was organized and managed, with the more complex doctoral institutions placing more emphasis on lobby activities. Of significance was the finding that, even across institutional type, the enrollment size of the institution impacted the scope and integration of the governmental relations function. At two-year institutions, Brown found that most colleges did not have a dedicated governmental relations professional, but rather relied on the college president to carry out lobbying efforts directly.

Ferrin (2003) described the background of higher education governmental relations professionals and looked to understand the perceptions of these professionals (as well as university presidents) related to skills and knowledge needed for success as in-house lobbyists. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted at twenty universities across the United States. Ferrin found three broad views of the necessary backgrounds and skill sets of governmental relations professionals. First, there was no particular background or experience needed rather personal qualities such as people skills and character were noted (pg. 103). Second, there was a need to have had political experience to be successful due

to the arcane nature of the political/legislative process. Lastly, others indicated that a deep understanding of the institution was necessary so that legislators would take the lobbyists as someone who was connected to academe and therefore serious (pg. 105).

Brumfield (2007) examined the functional and personnel trends within the governmental relations offices at institutions of higher education. The goal of the study was to attempt to determine if there was any relationship between organizational components and state funding levels. To accomplish this task Brumfield surveyed the governmental relations professionals at fifty- three public research universities. The key findings included a weak, but negative correlation between the size of the governmental relations office and state funding. Brumfield did indicate a positive relationship between state funding and the use of professional governmental relations staff. Neither of these findings was causal in nature. These findings were confirmed by Brumfield et al. (2009), who called for further research on how lobbying and governmental relations is organized in higher education. Brumfield and Miller (2008) reviewed the literature on higher education governmental relations and again called for more study of how this function is structured and carried out.

The lobbying activities of governmental relations efforts at institutions of higher education, as well as the relative success of such strategies, is important to understand. Describing higher education lobbyists' characteristics and how the governmental relations effort is organized is important but understanding the perceptions of the relative effectiveness of lobbying techniques used by higher education institutions is essential. Murphy (2001) sought to understand the perceptions of governmental relations professionals regarding the relative effectiveness of various lobbying techniques for

higher education institutions in state legislatures. To accomplish this the researcher surveyed more than one hundred university governmental relations professionals from thirty-six states. The results indicated that there were three successful lobbying strategies as perceived by governmental relations professional. First, it is most useful to present messages and arguments directly to legislators. The respondents indicated that political leaders expected to have a face-to-face conversation if they were to take seriously the argument or request (pg. 140). Second, it is important to identify and use influential constituents to deliver key messages to legislators. Lastly, it is critical for institutions to develop a comprehensive legislative strategy that incorporates the best techniques. Governmental relations professionals argued that legislative efforts should not be seen as distinct plans but rather an ongoing iterative process.

Burgess and Miller (2009) also examined the perception among governmental relations professionals of effective lobbying techniques and strategies. Because this study sampled only ten governmental relations officers at public land-grant universities for their views, the ability to generalize findings is limited. Findings included the identification of fifty-eight lobbying strategies that authors called to be field tested and validated. Glade (2011) conducted research exploring how in-house governmental relations staff responded to the economic decline of 2008/2009. Specifically the author sought to understand the messages used by higher education lobbyists in this time of economic turmoil. Glade found that these higher education lobbyists used rational “value creation” or “value claiming” terms in constructing messages for legislators (pg. 177). Crucial was the notion that underlying successful lobbying efforts is the ability to build

direct and personal relationships with legislators and officials. Without this critical effort at building relationships, messaging is likely to be ineffective.

Since this study looked specifically at the state of Texas, research that examined higher education governmental relations efforts in the state is appropriate. Lesse (1983) examined the relationship between university presidents in Texas and the state's legislature. He surveyed all of the university presidents and the members of the Texas legislature. Among the study's findings and recommendations were that each president appoint a staff member to coordinate the governmental relations efforts and that each president seek to increase efforts to communicate with legislators - especially through personal visits. Garcia (1995) examined a single Texas university system's governmental relations office in an effort to understand why the function is needed and how it might achieve success. He argued that the relative success for governmental relations at institutions of higher education must center on specific goal setting and planning while developing close relationships with key policy makers.

Wolf (2004) conducted a similar analysis as Lesse (1983), surveying university presidents and state legislators. He found a more robust relationship between university presidents, their governmental relations staff, and legislators. Although, there was concern on the part of legislators that university presidents and governmental relations professionals were looking to directly lobby them rather than simply communicate the needs of the institutions. More recently Avery (2012) conducted a comparable study of Texas, and several other states, seeking to understand the relationship between universities and legislators. Avery found that (similar to Lesse and Wolf) specific keys to the success in managing the governmental relations function include the president and

governmental relations staff to maintain a robust and quality relationship with elected officials.

Lobbying by governmental relations professionals at institutions of higher education is a critical function to insure the long-term success of these public institutions (Murray, 1976; Cook, 1998; Thelin, 2004). Understanding how this function is structured and organized, the characteristics of those that serve in the role of in-house lobbyist, and the strategies and techniques used are all important in this study. However, the literature is not well developed in the ways in which community colleges carry on this function. As discussed much of the existing research, as it relates to state level lobbying at institutions of higher education, is concentrated on how universities go about conducting governmental relations activities. Brown (1985) was the exception in the literature owing to her effort to look across institutional type when examining governmental relations. This study will help to deepen the research literature by examining how the governmental relations function is structured and effectively accomplished at the state level by community colleges in a single state.

### ***Conclusion***

The ways in which institutions of higher education organize and perceive the governmental relations function is at the heart of this study. Specifically this research effort is aimed at understanding how community colleges structure and carry out the state lobbying function. Open systems theory (von Bertalanffy 1956, 1968; Boulding, 1956; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Kast and Rosenzweig, 1976), and specifically Birnbaum's (1988) model of the environmental scanning cybernetic institution is the lens through which the governmental function will be examined. This allows the researcher to locate the

understanding of the governmental relations function as the institution responding to inputs in a negative feedback loop from its external political environment.

The existing research on public perceptions of higher education indicate that the public still sees the essential role these institutions play in economic and social mobility (Thelin, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Immerwahr, 2002, 2004, 2006). This is especially true when it comes to the increasing role played by community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). At the same time funding for higher education has seen reductions as states have faced other fiscal pressures (Hovey, 1999; Kane & Orzag, 2003; Smith, 2004; St. John & Parsons, 2004; Thelin, 2004; Johnstone, 2005; Zusman, 2005). Lobbying as an activity can be seen as a communications process (Milbrath, 1960) in which the governmental relations professional seeks to provide information to policymakers while modifying messages based upon feedback/stimuli. This concept of lobbying, as primarily a communications process, compliments the cybernetic institution's (Birnbau, 1988) use of inputs and outputs to self-correct and minimizes the uncertainty in a higher education organization.

This review of the literature included an analysis of the research related to how higher education governmental relations is organized and staffed, as well as effective lobbying strategies and techniques. However, a lack of research on this critical function in community colleges was identified (with the exception of Brown's (1985) study which did examine the lobbying efforts across types of institutions) including how two-year institutions organize and structure the governmental relations function. This study will help to fill the gap in the lobbying and governmental relations literature as it relates to community colleges.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this study was to understand how five Texas community colleges structure and carry out the function of governmental relations. By examining this function the researcher provides a better understanding how these critical public educational organizations seek to balance institutional goals with the pressures placed upon them by the legislative and policy environments. The study is a bounded, multiple case study that is qualitative in its approach. The methodology will include personal interviews with multiple individuals at Dallas County Community College District, Del Mar College, Midland College, Panola College, and San Jacinto College. Participants will include college Presidents or Chancellors, members of the board of trustees, and staff members whose responsibilities include involvement in the governmental relations function.

Individual, semi-structured interviews created the opportunity for each participant to describe specific perspectives of an institution's governmental relations structure and function. The researcher took notes during the interviews, electronically recorded each interview session, and then utilized a process of coding the data and interpreting the results. In conducting pre-interview research the author examined other documents including the organizational chart at each selected institution and other public documents on college Websites used for advocacy purposes. This assisted in understanding which staff members are responsible for governmental relations and how they fit into the broader institutional organizational structure. Varied perspectives emerged and assisted in

leading the researcher to utilize a constructivists/inductive approach to analysis (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2007). The following sections provide the context for the study and provide an explanation of the research methodology and approach utilized.

Creswell (2007) argued that the best method to define and limit the research process is for the researcher to provide a guiding “grand tour question,” while using sub-questions to help provide structure to the study. For this study the overarching question was: “How do differently sized community colleges structure the organizational function known as governmental relations and how do college leaders describe the operations of this function?” Additional questions were utilized to provide supporting information and context for answering the central question were as follows:

- Research Question 1- How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?
- Research Question 2 - How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants’ descriptions of how their community college structures the function?
- Research Question 3 - Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?
- Research Question 4 - How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?
- Research Question 5 - Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?

### ***Rationale for Qualitative, Case Study Approach***

Qualitative research gives a researcher an opportunity to more deeply understand a topic and discover information not commonly uncovered by quantitative approaches, since the approach permits participants to expand on specific views or ideas and to provide examples (Hatch, 2002). Creswell (2007) and Hatch's (2002) descriptions of qualitative research are related. Hatch indicated that a qualitative approach involves 1) a naturalistic setting, 2) participant perspectives, 3) the researcher as data gathering instrument, 4) extended firsthand engagement of the researcher, 5) centrality of meaning, 6) wholeness and complexity, 7) subjectivity, 8) emergent design, 9) inductive data analysis, and 10) reflexivity (pg. 6-10).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) investigating multiple institutions allows a researcher to probe differing perspectives presented by the participants to create multiple, valid realities that add to the depth of the study. A qualitative approach was selected for this study since an in-depth analysis of differing perspectives was needed to fully understand the way in which community colleges structure and carryout the governmental relations function. For the purposes of this study, an investigation of multiple institutions of differing student headcount enrollments enabled a deeper understanding of whether there were contrasting governmental relations structures based on the sizes of the institutions. The researcher served as the sole instrument in collecting data for the study from multiple sources, with most of the data collected in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002, Stake 1995). Sources of data included interviews and relevant public documents that were collected related each case. Collected data contributed to a rich descriptive detail for each specific case. Semi-structured interviews

included open-ended, and probing, questions that focused on “how and why types” of queries. The overall structure for this qualitative study utilized a constructionist, or interpretivist, structure that Creswell (2007) described as a traditionalist approach to organizing qualitative research. Constructionist theory is defined within an interpretive approach to qualitative research with a focus on flexibility and theory that is developed through the researchers perspective (Charmaz, 2006, as cited by Creswell, pg. 65).

General approaches in qualitative research include the narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2007, Stake, 2006). This study used a multiple site, multiple case study approach, as described by Creswell (2007), Stake (2006), and Yin (2003). Creswell (2007) defined case study research as, “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information...and reports a case description and case-based themes” (pg. 73). Boundaries for the system (case) comprise the time, place/setting, events, and processes that constrain the case. Creswell argued that either multi-site studies involving several programs or studies involving single programs are suitable environments for examination. Creswell stated that in multiple case study research, the researcher selects multiple cases to illustrate an issue or concern, as opposed to instrumental cases that focus on an issue in one case, or intrinsic cases, which focus on the case itself due to its uniqueness. When researchers study multiple cases, Creswell recommended they use Yin’s (2003) “logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case” (pg. 74).

This study, focused on the way in which community colleges structure and organize the governmental relations function, included several methodologies recommended by Creswell. Multiple cases that are bounded by time and setting were studied. The on-site visits were one-time occurrences. Research methodologies were reproduced at each case study site including the posing of the same open-ended questions and similar documents were gathered at each of the community colleges. Detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information was used to inform the study. Sources of data included one-on-one, in-person interviews and the collection of pertinent documents describing organizational structure. The researcher first developed an interview guide, conducted an alternative pilot process with three participants, and then sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before conducting the study. The pilot procedure was conducted before IRB approval because the final interview guide was included in the information for the IRB approval process.

***Purposeful sampling.*** According to Creswell (2007), an appropriate number of cases to include in a multiple case study are four to five because that number will allow sufficient opportunity for theme analysis and cross-case comparisons. Following Creswell's recommendation this case study examined the structuring and carrying out of the governmental relations function at five community colleges in Texas. A purposeful sample was used in the study. Community colleges were selected because they can purposefully provide an understanding of the problem being examined (Creswell, 2007). Hatch (2002) pointed out that for multiple case studies "balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (pg. 6). Each selected institution represented one of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer

groups, which categorized colleges with different sized student enrollments. Also, sites were selected with an eye towards reflecting the geographic diversity of Texas – both demographic and geographic.

***Site and participant selection.*** The study population consisted of five community college districts located in the state of Texas: Dallas County Community College District, Del Mar College, Midland College, Panola College, and San Jacinto College. Each of these institutions fall into the Carnegie Foundations classification of “Assoc: Associate’s” (Carnegie, 2013). Further, each site is a member of one of the four Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s accountability peer groups: Very Large College, Large College, Medium College, and Small College (THECB, 2013). Each of these categories is based on the enrollment size of an institution. For this study the five case study sites represent the following Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s peer group categories:

- Very Large – Dallas County Community College District & San Jacinto College
- Large – Del Mar College
- Medium – Midland College
- Small – Panola College

Two institutions were selected from the Very Large category as a way of over selecting colleges that represent the largest number of student enrollments in the state. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2013) the ten members of this peer group category represent sixty-seven percent of total community college enrollments in Texas. The notion being that these institutions have a more pronounced need to advocate

or lobby for resources given the large number of students they serve, which is correlated to larger communities and larger legislative delegations. Additionally, by selecting two institutions in this category, findings and recommendations are more readily relevant to other large urban community colleges in the United States.

### ***Data Collection***

Creswell (2007) argued that data collection methodologies for case study research should typically be “extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information” (pg. 75) as means of adding depth to the case. He contended that “confirming or triangulating data from several sources” serves to validate qualitative studies (pg. 45). Creswell (2007) pointed to four basic types of qualitative data; observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. For the purpose of this study two methods will be employed, 1) transcripts of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with community college administrators and board members; and 2) public documents gathered on site, or found on institutional Websites that verify the organizational structure of the college.

***Semi-structured interviews.*** Interviews with administrators and board members at five community colleges in Texas were the primary focus of this study. Creswell (2007) stated that one a general guideline regarding qualitative research involves collecting “extensive detail about each site or individual studied” (pg. 126). The goal in this effort is to clarify the specific, rather than seeking to generalize information. The researcher observed Creswell’s guideline by conducting interviews that focus on the perceptions and descriptions used by college administrators and leaders related to governmental relations function at the five community colleges to be studied. Interviews were conducted with the chief executive officer, members of the board of trustees, and any staff member

responsible for the governmental relations function at the participating community colleges. Questions were open-ended and follow-up questions were probing in nature. By asking such questions and by suggesting participants provide examples, interviews generated explanations of participant's unique experiences and stories (Stake, 1995).

Texas contains fifty community college districts and the "Very Large" accountability group is comprised of only ten colleges. This study examined five colleges, of the overall fifty, and two of the ten in the Very Large accountability group. With so few possible institutions, keeping the five colleges in the study unnamed was problematic and unlikely effective. In addition, the descriptions and characteristics of the five participant colleges in the study made maintaining anonymity of these institutions virtually impossible. Due to these factors the researcher sought and received permission from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln enabling the subjects to be interviewed, and the institutions they represent, to be named in the study.

Table 1 provides a list of each interviewee at the five community colleges.

	<b>Dallas County Community College District</b> (Very Large Peer Group)	<b>Del Mar College</b> (Large Peer Group)	<b>Midland College</b> (Medium Peer Group)	<b>Panola College</b> (Small Peer Group)	<b>San Jacinto College</b> (Very Large Peer Group)
<b>CEO</b>	Dr. Joe May	Dr. Mark Escamilla	Dr. Stephen Thomas	Dr. Greg Powell	Dr. Brenda Hellyer
<b>Board Member</b>	–	Trey McCampbell	Steven Castle	William Goolsby	Marie Flickinger
<b>Additional GR Staff</b>	EVC & Chief of Staff: Dr. Justin Lonon	ED of Strategic Communication and GR: Claudia Jackson	–	–	VC, Marketing, PR, and Public Affairs: Teri Crawford

Table 1 - Summary of Participants

Each interview took approximately forty-five minutes each to complete. To increase the reliability of data collected, the researcher requested permission to record the interviews by electronic means. These audio recordings were transcribed by a transcription service following each interview. Notes were also written by the researcher during the interviews in order to complement audio recordings. However, following Stake's (1995) suggestion that, "during the actual exchange, the interviewer needs most to listen, maybe take a few or many notes, as fits the occasion" (pg. 65), the researcher endeavored to focus on what is being said during the interview.

Interviews were single occurrences but if follow-up questions were required for clarification, participants were contacted by email or telephone. The on-site interviews were carefully centered on collecting data appropriate to the study's research questions. Creswell (2007) asserted that interview questions are, "a narrowing of the central question and sub-questions in the research study" (p. 134). He also suggested utilizing an interview protocol (pg. 135). This procedure was used in this study: 1) utilized a form that contains four to five open-ended questions and ample space for the researcher to take notes; and 2) closing comments that included thanking the participant and requesting permission to ask follow-up questions at a later time if needed.

The researcher developed an initial interview guide comprised of questions that were a further narrowing of the central question and sub-questions. These initial interview questions were generated by reviewing previous research focused on governmental relations in higher education including Leese (1983), Brown (1985), Fairchilds (2001), Peterson (2002), and Wolf (2004). The researcher then conducted an alternative pilot process that utilized a pool of experts including a community college

president, a member of a college board of trustees, and a college governmental relations professional to review and provide comments on how best to improve the interview guide. According to Creswell (2007), the goal of such pilot testing is to “refine the interview questions and the procedures further” (p. 133). Yin (2009) argued that the scope of a pilot “can be much broader and less focused than the ultimate data collection plan” (p. 93). He recommended selecting pilot cases according to convenience, access, and geographic proximity. The study’s proposed alternative process accomplished the objectives of a pilot study in its refinement of the interview questions for the final interviews.

Participants were asked to sign a consent form, along with the researcher, that specified: 1) the participant’s right to withdraw from the study at any time; 2) the purpose of the study; 3) the procedures to be used in the study; 4) the known risks, if any; 5) the benefits for participants; and 6) the inability to ensure confidentiality of the participant given the nature and structure of the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 123). Although Creswell (2007) stated “a researcher develops case studies of individuals that represent a composite picture rather than an individual picture,” (p. 141) the structure of this study did not allow the institutions, nor participants, to remain confidential.

***Public documents.*** Stake (1995) stated “gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing” (pg. 68). Selected documents were sought to provide additional insight into institutional governmental relations structures and activities. Documents sought, and reviewed, include the following; 1) institutional organizational charts, 2) information and documents related to governmental relations/lobbying activities such as institutional legislative priorities, and

3) budget documents related to institutional governmental relations expenditures. These documents were requested, or located, by the researcher prior to each interview and were used to help provide context of the governmental relations function at each institution including where this function lies in the organizational structure, any legislative priorities, and the expenditure of institutional financial resources on this function.

### ***Data Analysis***

Hatch (2002) described data analysis as, “a systematic search for meaning” (p.148), while Creswell (2007) likens the analysis of data to a spiral in which the progression moves “in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (p. 150). Creswell’s non-linear method to data analysis will be followed in this study. The first circle in the spiral is data management, which involves transforming the data to text and then arranging it into a structure that allows for straightforward retrieval and analysis. Computer software programs are available to aid with this component of the research. Creswell (2007) argued that software programs tend to be best used with large amounts of data. Because the data for this analysis was considerable, the online product known as *Dedoose* was used to manage the data. Initial data management steps for the study entailed using a transcription service to transcribe interviews and designing for reflective notes, observational notes, and notes related to a review of public documents. All documents were stored in computer files that were backed-up in at least two separate locations/computer hard drives. Protocol forms created by the researcher assisted in the organization of data. The data was read multiple times with notes and memoing taking place (Ibid, 2007).

The subsequent activity, based upon Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral, was to move into the spiral consisting of the "describing, classifying, and interpreting loop" (pg. 151). The goal was to supply, "detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives" (pg. 151). Creswell further stated that detailed description, which means describing what the researcher observes, is a good starting point when discussing a case in a qualitative study. Details need to be provided in the framework of the case study's setting, place, or event (Creswell, 2007). In multiple cases, such as in this study, Creswell advised using a structure that utilizes a "within-case analysis" followed by a "cross-case analysis" (pg. 75). The within-case analysis provides a detailed description of each case and themes within the each case and the cross-case examination provides thematic analysis across the cases and provides interpretations of the meaning of the case (pg. 75). The researcher provided a detailed narrative of each case in an effort to answer the research questions and then provided a comparison between cases to determine any significant differences based on enrollment size. The researcher utilized tables and figures to help describe each institution by presenting such data as historic enrollments, institutional budgets, advocacy materials, and institutional organizational charts.

Creswell (2007) described a word table approach for cross-case analysis that is suggested by Yin (2003), and that approach will be used to enable the cross-case analysis of interview data for this study. Yin's 2x2 table provides a means for displaying the data about individual cases using a consistent structure. Creswell (2007) contended that the researcher can then look for "similarities and differences among the cases" (pg. 163). The researcher worked to look across the five participant colleges in this study for such

similarities and differences. To present the findings the researcher used a table format to graphically represent the results. Each participant college was described in terms of specific institutional characteristics providing context for the study. The organizational charts of each participant were discussed as they relate to the governmental relations function.

The researcher utilized coded categories as a means of analyzing the transcripts of the interviews allowing for a systematic assessment. Stake (2010) described coding as “sorting all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study” (pg. 151). The coding for this study will consist of lean coding, which Creswell (2007) described as five or six preliminary categories that expand to additional categories as the data is reviewed in an iterative process. As much as possible, the study used in vivo codes, which Creswell (2007) defined as “names that are the exact words used by participants” (pg. 153). To verify the coding process used with interview transcripts, the researcher had two other researchers review the coding from a transcript to check for agreement (Creswell, 2007). Both have conducted qualitative studies case studies during the completion of their doctoral programs. One completed his Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Texas at Austin. The other peer serves at a community college in Texas (not one of the case colleges) and completed her doctorate in Community College Leadership from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Validation.** Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers “employ accepted strategies to document the ‘accuracy’ of their studies,” which he terms validation strategies (pg. 207). Specific strategies suggested by Creswell that were used in this study included clarifying any researcher bias, using multiple and different sources of data to

shed light on the study's theme and perspective, and using member checking to solicit other governmental relations practitioners' views on the accuracy of the study's findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007). Additional forms of validation in the study included an opportunity for interview participants to review transcripts for accuracy. Each participant was provided the transcript of their individual interview and sometime later a summary of the findings and themes uncovered during the research.

### ***Role of the Researcher***

Transcripts of interviews and public documents were collected and analyzed by the researcher. The specific qualifications of the researcher to conduct this study include: 1) holding a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from the University of Texas, 2) more than twenty years of direct experience in the state legislative process including serving for five years as Chief-of-Staff for a Texas state House member, and 3) more than eleven years working for the state community college association in Texas representing the member colleges at the state capitol.

### ***Personal Bias***

Creswell (2007) argued that to ensure sound case studies, the researcher must be "reflexive or self-disclosing about his or her position in the study" (pg. 219). The researcher for this study serves in the role of chief governmental relations officer for the Texas Association of Community Colleges, which represents all fifty community college districts in the state. Because of the researcher's closeness to the issues and the participant colleges, the potential for bias, or preconceived notions, was present. Stake (2010), argued that, "all researchers have biases, all people have biases, all reports have biases, and most researchers work hard to recognize and constrain hurtful biases" (p.

164). In this instance, due to his familiarity with the subject, the researcher was better equipped to conduct interviews, interpret answers to questions, and to uncover themes.

In addition, it is important to recognize the specific experience that the researcher has in governmental relations, which could contribute to preconceived notions the researcher has about the topic. The researcher believes that governmental relations plays an important role in the operations of a community college and that a college CEO is one of the key factors behind its success. It is with these assumptions and preconceived notions that the researcher approached this multiple case study. Creswell (2007) noted that researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (p. 38). The researcher’s role as data collector primarily focused on interviewing the case study participants. As an interviewer, the researcher followed guidelines from Creswell (2007) in regards to conducting high quality interviews that yield useful data.

To ensure an accurate and credible study was conducted, 1) data was collected from multiple sources; 2) systematic procedures, based on Creswell (2007) and Yin’s (2003) approach to case study research, were used throughout the study; 3) reviews of public documents provided descriptive details of the cases; 4) transcripts and initial themes/findings were reviewed by participants for accuracy and to provide feedback on needed changes; and 5) two other researchers cross-checked the coding process used with interview transcripts.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Report on Findings**

#### ***Introduction***

Chapter 4 is divided into four sections. First, an overview of community colleges in Texas and background/contextual information for each of the five cases is presented. The second section reports the findings of the study organized by the respective research questions. Themes that emerged across the cases are presented. The concluding sections of this chapter provides a description of the themes that emerged from the data and a summary of the findings.

The following central question guided this study: “How do community colleges across four peer groups structure the organizational function known as governmental relations and how do college leaders describe the operations of this function?” Additional questions provided supporting information and context for answering the central question:

- Research Question 1- How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?
- Research Question 2 - How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants’ descriptions of how their community college structures the function?
- Research Question 3 - Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?

- Research Question 4 - How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?
- Research Question 5 - Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?

Data related to the research questions were collected through several sources from five community colleges from the state Texas. These data sources included in-depth, in person interviews with college presidents/chancellors, members of college boards of trustees, and college administrators responsible for governmental relations; college organizational charts/structures; and personal observations. The interviews for this study consisted of twelve individuals who were each interviewed in-person. The subjects included five college CEOs, four chairs of the college board of trustees, and three senior staff members whose duties include governmental relations efforts. The interviews themselves lasted from forty minutes to one hour and were all conducted at the participants office or college's conference room. The general tone of the interviews was casual and every participant had a welcoming demeanor, willing to share their experiences and stories. Each had at least 5 years of experience serving in their current role or in a role similar at a previous institution. Each participant was provided a copy of the finished transcript to review for accuracy. None of the participants provided any comments with changes to the transcriptions.

The interviews were professionally transcribed by an outside service and compiled in preparation for analysis. The researcher reviewed five random sections (at least one page) of each transcript to insure accuracy by listening to these sections from the

audio recording and then comparing them to the written transcription. The researcher assigned each participant to one of the following designations: “CEO” for college president or chancellor; “BM” for college board member; “GR” for other staff who have governmental relations responsibilities. The number that follows indicates the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board peer grouping based on the following: Extra Large College - 1; Large College – 2; Medium College – 3; and Small College – 4.

As described in Chapter 3, the data were then coded, categorized, and analyzed through inductive processes to arrive at themes that consistently arose throughout the research process. Notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews in order to complement audio recordings. However, following Stake’s (1995) suggestion that, “during the actual exchange, the interviewer needs most to listen, maybe take a few or many notes, as fits the occasion” (pg. 65) the researcher strove to focus on what was being said during the interview. During the interviews the researcher took notes that contained the important points made by the participants that so that they could be reviewed post-interview.

Following the coding process outlined in Chapter 3, the researcher examined the transcripts for codes and then, from the codes, for common themes. Themes emerged though this process of coding and analyzing the data. These themes were then verified and supported through the evaluation of the data obtained from college Websites. This evidence included organizational charts, legislative priorities, and specific webpages related to the governmental relations function. The goal was to supply, “detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives” (Creswell 2007, pg. 151).

### ***Texas Community Colleges***

The state of Texas has 50 public community college districts serving nearly 700,000 credit students (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). The 50 community college districts in Texas vary from rural single-campus districts with enrollments of less than 2000 students to large urban multi-campus districts with more than 80,000 students enrolled in credit bearing classes. Each of these institutions is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has created four peer groupings of community colleges for the statewide accountability system in Texas based on student enrollment size: Very large peer group (10 largest colleges); Large peer group (8 colleges); Medium peer group (23 colleges); and Small peer group (9 colleges). In 2007, the Coordinating Board formally assigned each community college to the peer groups. The assignment was intended to increase peer group knowledge, encourage the use of accountability data, and to enhance peer group interaction and collaboration (THECB, 2013).

### ***Case Studies***

Each institution has its own student demographic mix, budget size, organizational structure, and represents one of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer groups. Table 2 provides an overview of the details of each of the five cases.

	DCCCD	Del Mar College	Midland College	Panola College	San Jacinto College
THECB Peer Group	Very Large	Large	Medium	Small	Very Large
Student Enrollment (Credit)	80,000	10,000	4,600	2,500	30,000
Number of Campuses	7	3	1	1	3
Annual Budget	\$535 million	\$77 million	\$60 million	\$25 million	\$249 million
Location	Dallas Metro	Corpus Christi (Gulf Coast /South Texas)	Midland (West Texas)	Carthage (East Texas)	Houston Metro
GR Staff other than CEO? / Number of GR staff	Yes 3-4  (also, 7 campus presidents)	Yes 2-3	No -	No -	Yes 2-3
Use of External Lobbyist	Yes (Only at Federal level)	No	No	No	No (Federal in the past)
Tenure of CEO	1 year	7 years	7 years	15 years	6 years
Tenure of primary GR Staff person	10 years	20 years	N/A	N/A	8 years
State House Delegation	13 House 4 Senate	3 House 2 Senate	2 House 1 Senate	1 House 1 Senate	6 House 3 Senate

Table 2 – Summary of Cases

### **Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD)**

DCCCD is comprised of seven individually accredited institutions by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges located in Dallas County, Texas, which is the ninth most populous county in the United state with a population of more than 2.3 million inhabitants. The seven institutions that comprise DCCCD are: Brookhaven College, Cedar Valley College, Eastfield College, El Centro College, Mountain View College, North Lake College, and Richland College. The

individual accreditation of each college is an important distinction since each of the other four case institutions is singularly accredited. Each of these colleges has its own college presidents who report to the District Chancellor. DCCCD was founded in 1965 when voters of Dallas County created the institution and approved the initial bond to finance operations. DCCCD serves Dallas County Texas. In 1966, El Centro College became the first to open to enroll students. DCCCD added Eastfield College and Mountain View College in 1970 and in 1972 added Richland College. Cedar Valley College and North Lake College both opened their doors to students in 1977. DCCCD added its last institution in 1978 with the addition of Brookhaven College.

DCCCD is classified as a “Very Large College” within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s “Peer Groups.” In the Fall of 2014, DCCCD enrolled more than 80,000 credit students and more than 20,000 continuing education students. The student population’s make up is: 37.1 percent Hispanic, 24.9 percent White, 24.8 percent African American, 8 percent Asian, and 5.2 percent all others. The College has more than 7,000 full and part-time faculty, staff, and administrators. The DCCCD’s total operating budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 was more than \$535 million. Within its boundaries of Dallas County, the DCCCD’s state legislative delegation includes thirteen members of the Texas House (out of 150 total members) and four members of the Texas Senate (out of 31 total members).

DCCCD has a board of trustees consisting of seven elected members. The board meets the first Tuesday of each month to consider business. The Chancellor serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the district and is appointed by the board of trustees. The Chancellor has served at DCCCD since 2014 and prior to this current position served as

President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, as System President of the Colorado Community College System, and prior to that role as President of Pueblo Community College. The Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief of Staff (EVP) has been at the district since 2005 and has responsibility for governmental relations, public relations, and marketing. The EVP has recently been appointed to this newly created position. Until recently the position title was Vice Chancellor, Public & Governmental Affairs.

### **Del Mar College**

Del Mar College (DMC) is located in Corpus Christi, Texas, which has a population of more than 300,000 inhabitants. It consists of two primary campuses in Corpus Christi - the East Campus and West Campus and a Center in the northwest part of Nueces County, Texas. DMC serves Nueces and three other counties in the gulf coast region of Texas. The institution was founded in 1935 when the voters created a property tax to establish the Corpus Christi Junior College within the Corpus Christi Independent School District. In 1948 the institution was renamed Del Mar (Spanish for “of the sea”).

DMC is classified as a “Large College” within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s “Peer Groups.” In the Fall of 2014, DMC enrolled more than 10,000 credit students and more than 11,000 continuing education students. The student population’s make up is: 62.4 percent Hispanic, 27.3 percent White, 3.4 percent African American, and 7.0 percent other. DMC has more than 300 academic staff and an operating budget of more than \$77 million in fiscal year 2014-2015. The DMC’s state legislative delegation includes three members of the Texas House (out of 150 total members) and two members of the Texas Senate (out of 31 total members).

The board of regents has nine elected members (four at-large and five in single member districts) who serve for six-year terms. The board meets the second Tuesday of each month to consider business. The President serves as the Chief Executive Officer for DMC and is appointed by the board of regents. The President has served at Del Mar College since 2008 and prior to this current position served as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Tyler Junior College. The Executive Director of Strategic Communication and Government Relations has been at Del Mar College for more than twenty years and has responsibility for governmental relations, public relations, and marketing.

### **Midland College**

Midland College (MC) is located in Midland, Texas. It consists of one primary campus and four centers located in Midland County, Texas (which has population of more than 123,000) and one center in Fort Stockton, Texas. MC serves Midland and four other counties in far West Texas. The college was created after the state Legislature granted Midland the ability to dis-annex from the Permian Junior College System in 1972. The original system included Odessa College in Odessa, Texas (20 miles from Midland) however the citizens of Midland wanted a campus located in their city. After the separation, the Permian Junior College System was effectively dissolved leaving Odessa College and Midland College.

MC is classified as a “Medium College” within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s “Peer Groups.” In the Fall of 2014, Midland College enrolled more than 4,600 credit students and more than 11,000 continuing education students. The student population’s make up is: 46.2 percent Hispanic, 40.6 percent White, 6.5 percent

African American, and 6.6 percent other. MC's total operating budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 was more than \$60 million. MC's state legislative delegation includes two members of the Texas House (out of 150 total members) and one member of the Texas Senate (out of 31 total members).

The board of trustees has nine elected members who serve for six-year terms representing at-large places. The board meets the third Tuesday of each month to consider business. The President serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the college and is appointed by the board of trustees. The president has served since 2008 and before that served for eight years as president of Vernon College.

### **Panola College**

Panola College (PC) is located in Carthage, Texas, which has a population of more than 6800 inhabitants. It consists of the primary campus in Carthage, Texas and also has center in cities of Marshall and Center, Texas. PC serves Panola and three other counties in East Texas near the border with Louisiana. PC was created in 1947 after a vote of the citizens of Panola County voted a tax to establish a two-year college in Carthage.

PC is classified as a "Small College" within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's "Peer Groups." In the Fall of 2014, Panola College enrolled more than 2,500 credit students and more than 750 continuing education students. The student population's make up is: 64.0 percent White, 22.0 percent African American, 11.2 percent Hispanic, and 2.9 percent other. The College's total operating budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 was more than \$25 million. The college's state legislative delegation

includes one member of the Texas House (out of 150 total members) and one member of the Texas Senate (out of 31 total members).

The board of trustees has seven elected members who serve for six-year terms representing at-large places. The board meets the last Monday of each month to consider business. The President serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the college and is appointed by the board of trustees. The President has served since 2000 as Panola College's CEO. Prior to coming to PC the President had served as a Vice President of Academic Affairs and as a full-time faculty member at another Texas community college for more than a decade.

### **San Jacinto College**

San Jacinto College (SJC) is located in Pasadena (population of more than 150,000) and Houston, Texas (population of more than 2 million). It consists of three primary campuses: Central Campus, North Campus, and South Campus. SJC also has five extension centers. The college serves all of six independent school districts (ISD) and the portions of two other ISDs. SJC was created in 1960 when the voter in Channelview, Deer Park, Galena Park, La Porte, and Pasadena ISDs approved the creation of East Harris County Union Junior College. In 1961 the newly elected board of regents renamed the institution San Jacinto College and opened at what became the Central Campus. In 1975 the North Campus opened and in 1979 the college opened the South Campus.

SJC is classified as a "Very Large College" within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's "Peer Groups." In the Fall of 2014, Central Campus enrolled more than 13,000 credit students. The student population's make up is: 50.1 Hispanic, 33.2

percent White, 6.6 percent African American, and 10 percent other. In the Fall of 2014, North Campus enrolled more than 7,000 credit students. The student population's make up is: 57.9 Hispanic, 19.2 percent White, 15.8 percent African American, and 7.1 percent other. In the Fall of 2014, South Campus enrolled more than 10,000 credit students. The student population's make up is: 40.5 Hispanic, 31 percent White, 11.4 percent African American, and 17.2 percent other. SJC's total operating budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 was more than \$249 million. SJC's state legislative delegation includes six members of the Texas House (out of 150 total members) and three members of the Texas Senate (out of 31 total members).

SJC has a board consisting of seven elected members who serve at-large districts for six-year terms. The board meets the first Monday of each month to consider business. The Chancellor serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the district and is appointed by the board of trustees. The Chancellor has served in this role at San Jacinto College since 2009 and has been at the college since 2000 serving previously in the roles of Vice President of Resource Development, Chief Financial Officer, and Executive Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor for Marketing, PR, and Public Affairs has been at SJC since 2007 and has significant responsibility related to governmental relations.

### ***Findings***

**Research Question 1-** How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?

Organizational charts were acquired by the researcher from college Internet Websites for each of the five colleges that comprised the cases for this study. The researcher simplified each of the organizational charts to reflect senior level staff at each

of the five case study institutions. All were similar in that they listed the college CEO as directly responsible to the College Board of Trustees / Regents. In three of the five cases, there was a staff position identified on the organization chart as having level of public affairs or governmental relations responsibilities.

The organizational chart of the Dallas County Community College District can be seen in Figure 4.1.

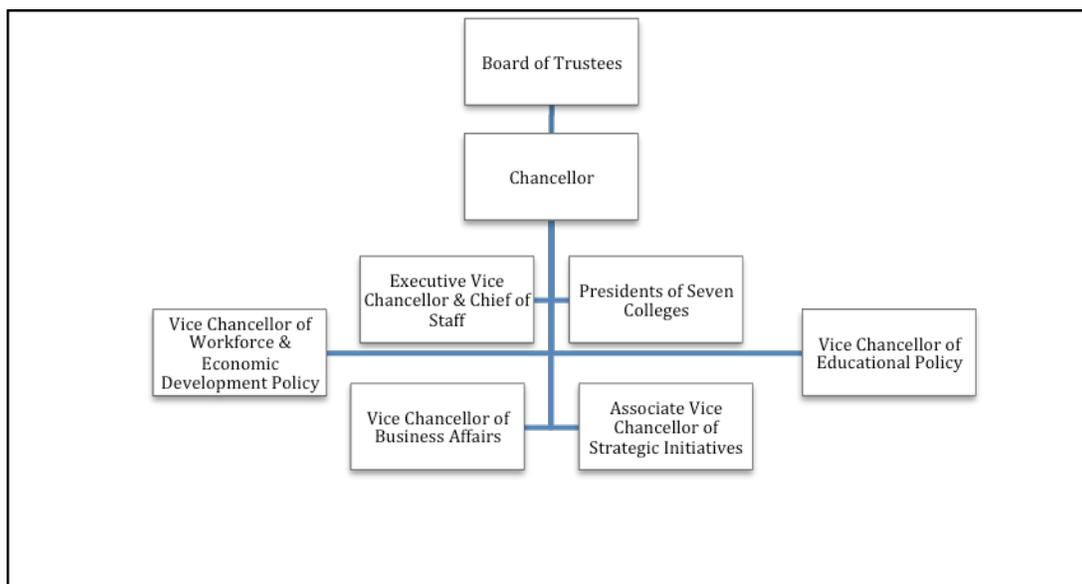


Figure 4.1 - Dallas County Community College District

This chart reflects a direct reporting line from the EVP & Chief of Staff to the Chancellor of DCCCD. The Chancellor is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all functions of the District including GR, “No, it’s [governmental relations] going through me. Basically the chancellor works for the board” CEO1. One of the key functions of the EVP & Chief of Staff is to provide support to the Chancellor in the GR function, “Sure, so that [governmental relations] is primarily my responsibility at the direction of the Chancellor of course. But the design and the execution, the day-to-day pieces are my primary responsibility.” GR1. The Chancellor is directly supported in the governmental

relations function by the EVP & Chief of Staff. The EVP & Chief of Staff has seen his responsibilities expand beyond governmental relations but has retained the GR function.

DCCCD is unique among the cases for this study due to its distinct structure.

DCCCD is comprised of seven individually accredited colleges, each with its own college president. These CEOs are connected in some respects to their respective local communities and those legislators that represent them. Here the EVP & Chief of staff acts as a “hub” coordinating interactions with elected officials:

With the colleges spread out over a wide area in Dallas County, certainly there are both the colleges and individual legislators that see that as their legislator or their college. So the college presidents really are fantastic about if there's a house member from that area that's going to be on campus and it's not something I've coordinated; maybe they're coming to speak to a government class; then they let me know. GR1

Clearly in the case of DCCCD the Chancellor is functionally responsible for governmental relations but much of the coordination is carried out by staff in support of the district CEO.

The organizational chart of the Del Mar College (DMC) can be seen in Figure 4.2.

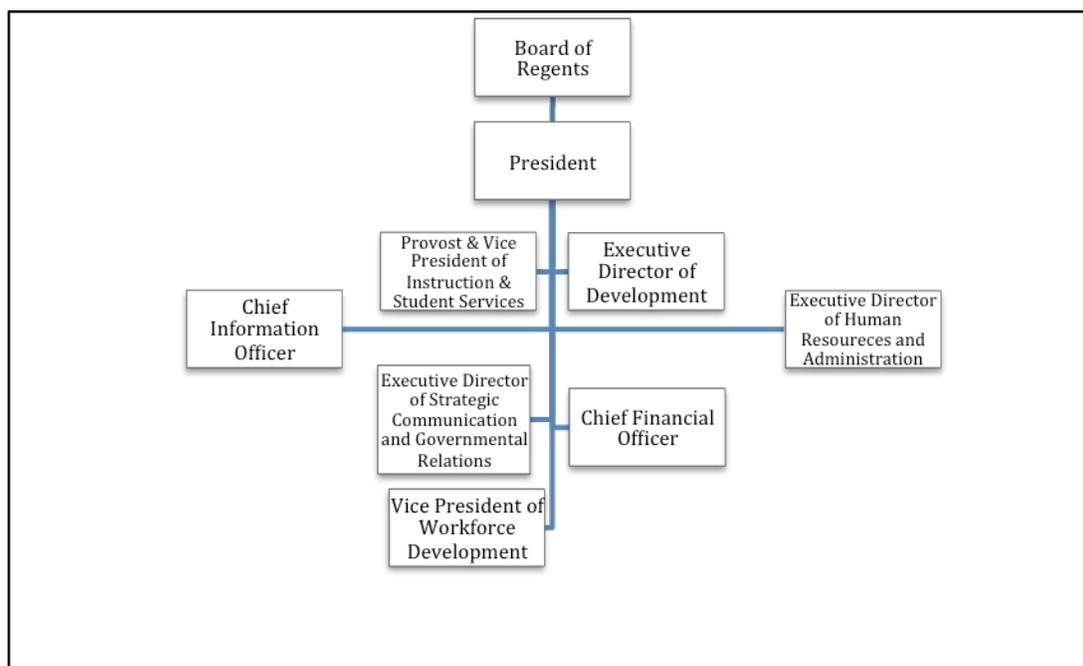


Figure 4.2 - Del Mar College

This chart reflects a direct reporting line from the Executive Director of Strategic Communications and Governmental Relations to the President of Del Mar College. The President is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all functions of DMC including GR:

I mean, Dr. Escamilla is the president, and just the fact that all of those top administrators report to him, he has ultimate responsibility, and the board has ultimate responsibility because he reports to us. BM2

The Executive Director has seen increased responsibilities as the position has evolved over time:

She's our executive director of governmental relations and strategic relations, strategic initiatives and those sorts of things. That role has grown where, and also handles board relations. I've really enhanced and expanded her role here at the college over the past few years from a PR person to full fledged executive cabinet member that, executive team member rather, that would get out there and tie in what was going on at the legislature with what the board was thinking. CEO 2

However the expansion of the position's responsibilities has been overlaid on top of existing and on-going governmental relations duties:

Oh, yeah, now the title actually is Executive Director of Strategic Communication and Government Relations. Which is kind of, that's only, and I think I've actually had that title about a year. And I was doing legislative, and the legislative piece was in my title for the last 5 years. GR2

Among the three institutions with a staff person other than the CEO with direct governmental relations duties, Del Mar College had the fewest number of students and the fewest number of members in the state legislature. The position has contained GR responsibilities for sometime but now has grown to encompass board relations as strategic communications.

The organizational chart of the Midland College (MC) can be seen in Figure 4.3.

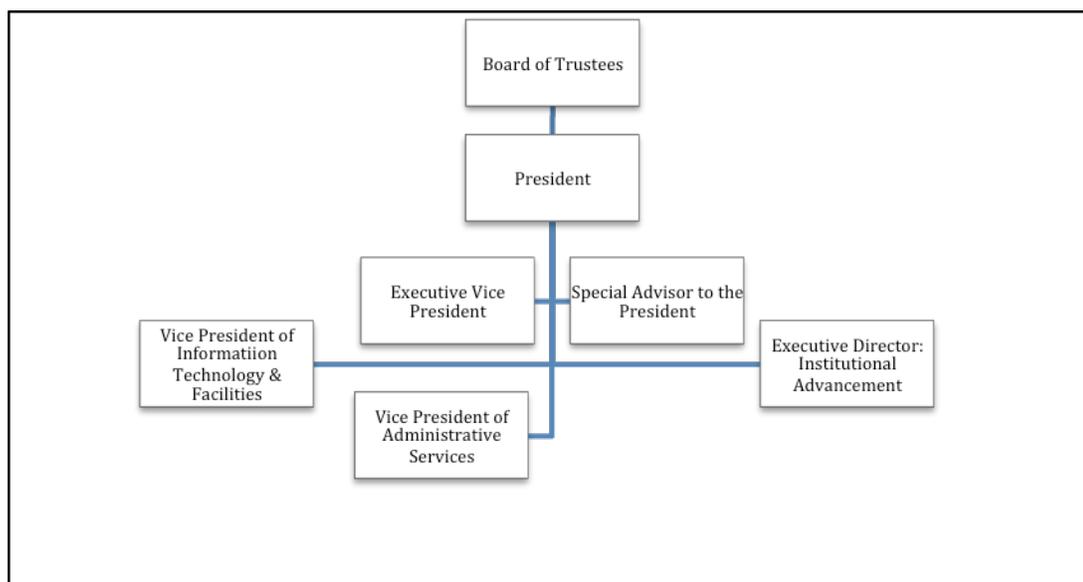


Figure 4.3 – Midland College

The chart reflects a direct reporting line from the Board of Trustees to the President. In this case there was no other staff person who had responsibilities for governmental relations. Instead it is the President who carries out the function:

To some extent our executive Vice President will deal with some of those issues, but I'm really the face of Midland College and I'm the one responsible for keeping our board informed about potential governmental issues. CEO3

Although the Board does expect that it retains some involvement in the process of interaction with the external policy environment through governmental relations. In effect, sharing the function to some extent with the college President and the senior staff members, "I think it's [governmental relations] a shared relationship between the board of trustees and Steve, our president and his executive management team." BM3.

Clearly, this is shared in the sense that the Board receives information and updates from the president and his staff as needed:

Yes. And that's what they've always expected of the President here. The board has a very hands off kind of approach to administration which is what they should be as a board. They're interested in policy but their view is they hire a president and staff to do the work .CEO3

The college president did indicate that he utilizes his staff as needed to help in the management of the governmental relations function. One particular direct report staff member, the Senior Advisor to the President, assists in some of these GR tasks:

I do have a special advisor who reports directly to me and she is our liaison with higher education coordinating board. She's also our liaison with SACS-COC. She deals with a lot of the accreditation compliance issues and those arenas. She's also, duties as assigned. If I need her to follow up on a particular piece of legislation or find out more about a potential piece of legislation or whatever, I can always have her do the research for me.

Neither Midland College's organizational chart, nor Website, specifically identifies a staff person or office that is responsible for the governmental relations function. Both the Board Member and President reported that it was the responsibility of the CEO to carry out GR responsibilities. Utilizing the Special Advisor does not change this fact.

The organizational chart of Panola College (PC) can be seen in Figure 4.4.

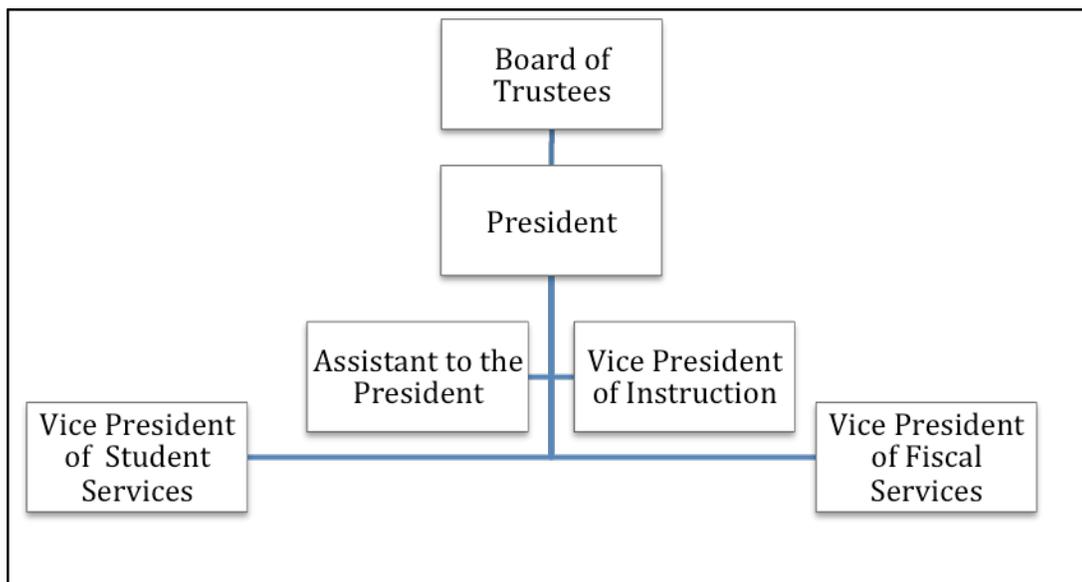


Figure 4.4 - Panola College

The chart reflects a direct reporting line from the Board of Trustees to the President. In this case there was no other staff person who had responsibilities for governmental relations. Rather it is the President who carries out the function:

Yeah. It is me and I think that is an expectation that my board has that I will be the point person for the college, not that I don't call on other people as I need them. By other people, primarily board members. Foundation board members but especially the board of trustees. CEO4

The Board of Trustees clearly understands the GR responsibility to be that of the PC's CEO:

I'm going to say 99% of our governmental relations are done by the President. As board, we don't get involved and that Dr. Powell services on several different committees in Austin at state level and then that's kind of his involvement at state level. BM4

For Panola College, the smallest of the five case community colleges, the President is the one who has both ultimate responsibility for governmental relations but also has less staff

support for the function. When asked if there were others on staff that he could call on for support or that might work with the board on governmental relations, the CEO indicated:

No, it's, I can pull the board policy but it specifically states that I am the spokesperson for the college. And I think it's understood that people at the college do not contact other people in the community without me requesting them to. CEO4

Clearly this relatively small college has a much less complex organizational chart and the President acts in a more direct and unsupported role in managing the GR function.

The organizational chart of San Jacinto College (SJC) can be seen in Figure 4.5.

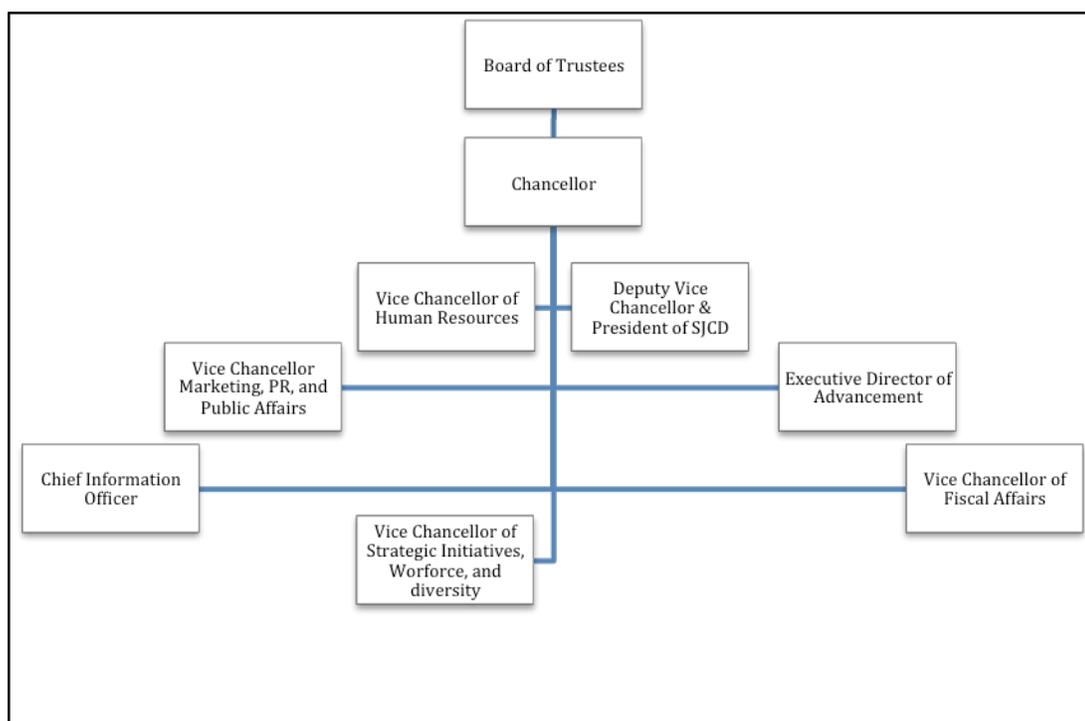


Figure 4.5 - San Jacinto College

This chart reflects a direct reporting line from the Vice Chancellor of Marketing, PR, and Public Affairs to the Chancellor of SJC. The Chancellor is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all functions of SJC including GR:

Well, even though Teri has that in her title, I still think the primary, I'm responsible for everything. But who's doing more of the day-to-day legwork, you know, as such being, that's Teri. CEO1

The Board realizes that the Vice Chancellor is involved in conducting the operations of the GR function however it remains the ultimate responsibility of the Chancellor:

But I think it, one because of the nature of the beast, the fact that she is the chancellor I think it's necessary that she have a good relationship with the Senators and the State Reps and everything, but you know, she of course has to delegate a lot of stuff out. BM1

The direct reporting line in the organizational chart from the staff person with governmental relations duties to the Chancellor is important and necessary according to the Vice Chancellor, "I can't imagine doing this [governmental relations] in a structure where you didn't report directly to a CEO. I don't know how that would ever work."

GR1.

The researcher reviewed the organizational charts of the five community colleges in this study. Each of the five case colleges locate the CEO of the institution, or the District, as a direct report to the Board of Trustees / Regents within the organizational chart. The three institutions that have other staff with governmental relations duties place that position as a direct report to the institutions CEO. At the two colleges that do not have such additional, the CEO use other direct report positions to assist in information gathering or research on an "as needed" basis in support of government relations. It is important to note that DCCCD is different than the other four case colleges in that the seven presidents of the independently accredited colleges report to the chancellor directly. These college presidents to assist in the governmental relations function but it is the chancellor who coordinates the efforts and is directly responsible to the board for GR efforts.

**Research Question 2** - How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants' descriptions of how their community college structures the function?

The participants were asked a series of question that sought their descriptions of how the governmental relations function at each institution is integrated into the structure and operations of the institution. The goal was to better appreciate how the participants understand and describe this structure of this important function. The specific emphasis was the internal structure as it relates institutional administration including: The number of staff involved in the function?; How the board and other institutional stakeholders are informed?; and How the broader external community is provided information?

Of the colleges in this study three had a staff member other than the CEO who has governmental relations duties. In each of these three cases the staff member also received assistance from other staff members. At both of the colleges in the Very Large peer group (Dallas County Community College District and San Jacinto College) this additional staff support was a significant resources. At DCCCD the EVP & Chief of Staff has a substantial number of staff to call-on based on the governmental relations needs, "It would be about 3 or 4 people that get a different piece of it. Yes, it would be different percentages of their time depending on what's going on." GR1. Additionally, at DCCCD the presidents of the seven colleges also work with the district office on GR efforts in a coordinated and subordinate effort:

Not to get too much into how we're a different type of structure, but you've alluded to the 7 severally accredited colleges from the public policy side, we're one institution, one district, one legal entity that's recognized by the state. College presidents get that, they really recognize and understand that their colleges contact hours, but all the state funding, the local tax state funding, it shows up in the district level and then is allocated to the colleges, so they certainly recognize the importance of a coordinated district role in that, separate from their accreditation structure. GR1

Similarly the Vice Chancellor of San Jacinto College has a large staff spread across several areas that she can call on to help support the GR function:

Because we have such a wide scope in this office, so it's marketing, it's PR, Crisis Communication is here, the website is here, Social Media is here. We have all of our college publications, we have advertising, you know we have community affairs, so and we also do all the event management for the college.  
GR1

Both of these Very Large institutions have other staff that provides additional support for the senior administrator with GR responsibilities. Given the size and complexity of such large institutions this makes some sense. Each has the largest number of elected members in the state delegation and serve large urban areas of the state.

Del Mar College is a Large College in the Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer grouping. It also has a staff person other than the college CEO that has governmental relations duties. According to the college CEO the Executive Director utilizes a number of staff to assist her in the GR efforts:

But really all perspectives, so she has a team that has layers from technical support to well, people who gather the data, people who watch the legislation with her and for her and people who discern pertinent from impertinent. And those sorts of things as well as people who can gather them up, put them into a story, write them up in a creative useful fashion and/or put them into videos. So she has several layers of people who can translate the stories we're being told.  
CEO2

Although not as large as the other two colleges Del Mar does have a relatively large elected state house delegation and a sense that the college needs to be engaged in governmental relations. When the current CEO came to the college he felt that an increase focus on GR was appropriate:

What I found by coming to Del Mar was what I think, my instincts were in tune with what Del Mar wanted to do and that is that they wanted to expand governmental relations. I felt that it was much more important than any of the

colleges I had worked for prior had really given attention to. I felt it was much more important than they were actually putting the resources behind. CEO2

The other two smaller community colleges, Midland College and Panola College, both indicated that it was the exclusive role of the CEO to manage the governmental relations. The college President at Midland College may call on other senior staff for specific assistance but the CEO carries out the function and updates the board:

To some extent our executive Vice President will deal with some of those issues, but I'm really the face of Midland College and I'm the one responsible for keeping our board informed about potential governmental issues. CEO3

Similarly at Panola College it is the CEO who holds the governmental relations responsibilities:

Yes, I don't think you would see anything in writing or the policy manual that says Dr. Powell, that's one of his specific job duties, but he's the one that takes care of that [GR]. BM4

Inherent to the structure of the governmental relations function is how information and updates are provided to those responsible for the organization. Research question 1 demonstrated that although three colleges had an additional staff person with GR duties it is the college CEO who has ultimate responsibility to the Board for this function. However, these institutions are significant in size and therefore appear to diffuse the GR function across more staff in the organization. Participants at each of the five case community colleges reported keeping the Board informed of governmental relations activities as one key element of the function. The three larger colleges with additional GR staff indicated that this staff person was responsible for keeping the CEO and other key staff members informed. At San Jacinto College the Chancellor's

leadership team meets regularly and the Vice Chancellor with GR duties provides updates to the CEO and other senior staff:

Okay, to the leadership team, my strategic leadership team, Terry's given updates, so when we have team meetings, she'll give updates like in December. She brought in your update legislative agenda sheet. She went over what the things were that were already being filed. CEO1

Yes, and we have regular senior leadership meetings and we do what we call updates. Each person gives like an update on what's going on. That's where I would give an update. GR1

At this college the Vice Chancellor does not provide direct reports or updates to Board, I have never given a presentation on legislative affairs at a board meeting and at our regular board meeting." GR1.

At Dallas County Community College District the Executive Vice Chancellor provides updates to not only senior staff but also to the Board itself:

Certainly with the board, the board will approve our legislative agenda and there are different issues that different board members will get involved in given their involvement in the community and so, I'm the direct liaison with them and their constituents on those issues. Certainly I do our updates to the board at our board meetings. GR1

At Del Mar College the Executive Director also provides direct reports to the Board in addition to the President and his senior administrative staff, "Staff reports will just be a standard line item on the board agenda from now to the end of session." GR2.

At the two smaller institutions the President of the college is responsible for providing information to both their administrative teams and the board. Since there are not other staff directly involved with the GR function this is understandable. There is less complexity and organizational depth in which to diffuse the function. Both College CEOs reported that the board expected them to provide regular and timely updates on governmental relations:

Well, in a formal way I put it on the agenda as with the Texas Association of Community Colleges, with a TACC legislative priorities. I made copies of that, put it in the board packet, presented it to the board so that they are aware of our legislative agenda. And then informally I will just call board members and I try to keep them informed about what's going on. So quite a few telephone calls. I do some email, not a lot, but some to the board members. CEO4

When providing information to the internal college community all five community college discussed strategies that sought to achieve this same goal. Once again, given the relative differences in the size of the institution, the communications methods varied. The ultimate purpose expressed centered on how best to convey information related to governmental relations activities. All of the colleges reported using emails to the internal college community as a primary tool. For example, at San Jacinto College the Chancellor send out regular college-wide emails:

So, Brenda does a communication, she calls it the Chancellor Update. It used to come out weekly, then it came out bi-weekly, now it comes out when it comes out and it's just for her to let employees know what she's up to. And so typically when we're in the legislative session we'll do a legislative update.  
GR1

While all the institutions use this type of communications channel they diverge on additional techniques to reach the internal college community. These differences appear to be driven by variance in institutional size. The larger institutions, by virtue of the increase number of members of the internal college community, reported using other means to reach groups either in-person or virtually. At DCCCD and Del Mar College the CEOs use television as way of reaching the internal college community DCCCD uses packaged videos sent college-wide:

In the last year or so since this Chancellor's been here, we have done a weekly video update from the Chancellor every Friday that goes out. Some of the operational things, some strategic things that are going on, but that is the Chancellor on video for 3 minutes telling everyone in the district, it goes out district wide, what's going on.as there are legislative issues, that have come

up during that week, we'll include that in his communication, so the board, of course, gets that along with the rest of the district. GR1

At Del Mar College the institution uses its own channel on the local cable television system to broadcast board meetings and specific information updates:

I think it's time that it's proven this recognition, this projection of the college. Time has shown that Channel 19 is there, Channel 19 will be, Del Mar TV will be there. We're now doing this, so it's been part of this culture. When I got here, I said, oh my goodness, I'm going to have a board meeting with this TV on my face. CEO2

The other primary method of reaching the internal college community reported by the colleges centers on group gatherings, or "town halls", at which time the CEO provides updates to the group. At San Jacinto College the Chancellor schedules town hall meetings at the three campuses and invites staff and faculty to attend. The two smaller colleges also hold town hall meetings but particularly pointed out the vital and unique role these play in the small institution setting. As the President of Panola College indicated:

Sure. And I can get 150, 175 people in an auditorium and they can hear it directly from me and ask for clarification. You take a college that has 18, 20, 50, 70,000 people, that's just not possible. CEO4

And given the relative number of employees the president can call such meetings on a fairly regular basis:

At the beginning of the fall semester sort of welcome back all employees, I give them an update at that point every year and then during the legislative session, 2 or 3 times I will call everyone together or give that opportunity. CEO4

While all five colleges work to push information related to governmental relations out to internal college community the smaller institutions can leverage the smaller number of internal stakeholders to provide more direct contact. This allows for not only the sending

of messages but in the case of Panola College two-way interaction of the CEO with staff and faculty.

**Research Question 3** - Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?

This research question seeks to understand if there are any differences that might exist in the structure of the governmental relations function based on the relative size of the college based on its membership in the Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer groups. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the number of staff involved in the governmental relations does vary depending upon the size of the institution. The two colleges from the Very Large peer group and the college from the Large peer group each have a senior staff person besides the college CEO with some GR responsibilities. The two smaller community colleges did not have a similar staff person but instead rely exclusively on the college CEO for this function.

The researcher asked each participant if his or her college uses external paid lobbyist to assist in the governmental relations function. Participants at all five colleges indicated that the institution did not engage external lobbyist at the state government level. Participants from DCCCD and San Jacinto College pointed to the ability to manage the state governmental relations efforts with internal staff rather than paid external lobbyist:

The general philosophy has always been Austin is close enough we can get there; we can do what we need to do and go back and forth. That I could primarily be dedicated to be the boots on the ground, to be there for hearings even when there's nothing that's directly related to us...GR1

As far as state, no, we haven't. I looked at some but it just wasn't the right fit too many opinions. And I've had time, I've been doing this for 5 years now. I've had time to develop relationships with our members...GR1

At the Federal government level these largest two colleges have seen more reasons to extend the function beyond internal college staff. Participants from DCCCD and San Jacinto both stated they currently, or previously have engaged, external lobbyists at the Federal level. A participant from DCCCD said:

The federal level we have, shortly after I got here, I'd probably been here a couple of years when we decided to engage a D.C. based consultant that, those were back in the days of directive appropriations and we had never asked for directive appropriation. GR1

A participant from San Jacinto College said:

We used to, currently we are not. In D.C., when there was a potential for Congressional appropriations earmarks, we did hire a firm to help us get some of those appropriations. GR1

These two large institutions have historically seen the need to use paid lobbyists to extend their governmental relations efforts to Washington. But they continue to use college staff to manage to function at the state level.

Participants also pointed to other external associations as being part of the institutions governmental relations efforts. At the national level this included two primary organizations, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). These two membership groups represent the community colleges and the trustees at the Federal level before Congress and administrative agencies such as the Department of Education. For the smaller colleges these associations offer the ability to have some voice at the Federal level:

I went to the President's Academy with American Association of Community Colleges years ago and truthfully, our membership; my college's membership in AACC is primarily motivated by my desire for them to look after our

governmental relations, our legislative agenda with United State Congress.  
CEO4

Larger institutions also see the value of using the national associations:

ACCT we've always, we've been very active with that. Even before I was Chancellor we had board members going up there, the difference was at that point they didn't make any of the legislative visits they just went to get the updates. Now we go to the ACCT legislative whatever that's called and we're participating in the meetings but then we're also very aggressive in setting up our own meetings. CEO1

DCCCD also mentioned a relatively new, more limited membership, organization working at the national level with Congress and the Administration known as Restoring America's Middle Class (RAMC). This organization is viewed as way of enhancing Federal GR efforts being done by the larger national organizations, AACC and ACCT. Participants indicated that the District sees RAMC as a way to advance the DCCCD's policy objectives in Washington:

Whatever the issue is, we can move quickly and we do have, RAMC does, have a lobbyist in DC that we can then direct them to move on some issues. We try to align with the other national organizations with their policy papers and others where we can, but sometimes we're using very different tactics than they are.  
GR1

At the state level all participants mentioned two organizations they see as assisting them in governmental relations with the state Legislature and administrative agencies. The Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) represents all 50 community college districts in Texas and the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCATT) represents the locally elected trustees at these districts. Participants from each of the five case colleges indicated that they use TACC to assist in their governmental relations at the state Capitol in Austin. TACC does have to work to balance the interests of very large and very small institutions:

I think it's natural that some of the large institutions will get impatient sometimes or want to move on some different issues, or different directions that TACC has to balance the interest of the 50 and so there are one off issues that may pop up here and there but I think everyone understands and certainly in our district I understand it makes no sense for us to go running off on something by...GR1

Participants from the medium and small peer groupings indicated that TACC was a primary resource in the college CEO's governmental relations efforts at the state level. This is understandable given the limited resources and staff devoted to governmental relations at smaller colleges. These colleges' participation in TACC allows them to leverage resources at the association to impact policy and political decisions at the state Capitol in Austin:

And then statewide, certainly we need to look to the Texas Association of Community Colleges and the lobbyist that we contract with there to coordinate our efforts with the legislature and to provide direction for us. CEO4

CCATT is also viewed as a resource for governmental relations at the state level and serves as a linkage between the president's group (TACC) and the college trustees. This seemed to be the case across the four peer group sizes. A Large College participant said:

I feel that, particularly now the CCATT is more active, and particularly we've got a legislative committee that I serve...and you know, what they've done working with the president's organization that Mark serves on has been great, I mean we've got a consistent platform that both are touting. BM2

While a Medium College participant indicated:

Now within CCATT organization in Texas, we're a charter member of that, even as it's gone through iterations now from what it was to what it's evolved to. CEO3

The way in which colleges structure their Governmental relations efforts does appear to be impacted by the relative size of the institution's student population. The student enrollment size is correlated to the size of the community in which the college is

located. Larger communities indicate larger student enrollments and conversely smaller communities means smaller college student enrollments. The relative size of the community is, in turn, correlated to the size of the legislative delegation. All five indicated that the institutions CEO shoulders the ultimately responsibly for this function. There are differences in the assigning of additional staff to support this function. The three largest colleges all have dedicated governmental relations staff in addition to the college CEO while the smaller two colleges do not have such staff. None of the five colleges use external lobby staff at the state level. But the two colleges in the Very Large peer group both indicated that they currently (or historically) engage external lobby at the Federal government level.

All five institutions discussed the use of associations at both the Federal and State levels to help manage the governmental relations function. AACCC and ACCT were both mentioned as key to Federal relations. This was especially true of the two colleges that have no additional GR staff beyond the college CEO. TACC and CCATT were referenced as important for state relations efforts by all five colleges. All indicated that TACC and its legislative priorities serve as either their colleges priorities or as the core of a larger set of legislative requests. The larger colleges reported using these organizations to augment their own state GR efforts while the smaller colleges indicated that the associations serve a more direct role in helping the CEO manage the governmental relations function.

**Research Question 4** - How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?

Birnbaum (1988) frames institutions of higher education as cybernetic systems that seek to monitor the external environment. In order to carry out this monitoring function, the system must interact with the outside environment through receiving inputs and sending outputs. The participants were asked a series of questions that sought their descriptions of how inputs, or messages, are transmitted from external stakeholders to the college. They were also asked to describe to how outputs are the college system are transmitted back the external policy environment. The researcher sought to understand the participants' descriptions of the types and frequency of these inputs and outputs. There were three broad types of inputs/outputs identified by the participants – telephone calls, electronic messages (in the form of emails and text messages), and in-person interactions.

Participants reported the use of telephone calls as the least frequent method of providing outputs while more frequently seen as an input from external policy stakeholders. Participants indicated that most legislators rarely provided them a phone number that was a direct line (such as a cell phone). If the elected official do provide them a direct number they viewed this a valuable resource:

It's also being able to call them, having their telephone numbers and making that call, and knowing that they'll take the call. CEO

Often phone calls are inputs to the college system as external policy makers and their staff contact institutions. At DCCCD, Del Mar College, and San Jacinto College these inputs come mostly through the governmental relations staff person rather than directly to the CEO:

The majority of the volume is going through my office. There are times when a member will call her [chancellor] directly. GR1

At the two smaller colleges, participants indicated such contacts would come directly to the college president's office:

Mostly it'll come to me through my assistant. She'll get a phone call or she'll get an email. CEO3

Electronic mail (email) and text messaging (text) were described as being used in both receiving inputs and sending of outputs. Most participants indicated that email was not used as often with legislators directly but more often with staff:

So, I would say face-to-face as far as the load is the least, with the staff, my primary is email, it seems to be how they prefer to work. GR1

Although receiving emails from legislative staff appears to be commonplace sending emails was described as less common. In general terms, email was represented by participants as being less effective than other forms of communications in sending messages to the external policy environment:

I've always heard that the more senses you hit, in an issue, the more it gets into people's brain basically. And I mean if you just send them an email, I delete 2,000 emails a day I find on my computer. BM1

Although not used as frequently, texts were reported as more effective in reaching elected officials and their staff. Some of this may be attributable to the fact that to send a text message means the college administrator, or board member, has the cell phone number of the legislator or their staff. This makes for a much a much closer level of contact between the college system and the external environment. The use of texts appears to not be effected by the relative size of the institution with colleges from all peer groupings indicating the use of this communication tool:

If there's a particular issue that's moving, I can text them on their cell phone and say, "Hey, we need to talk about this."GR1

Now on a state level, I pretty regularly stay in touch with both our house representation and senate representation and I'll say that they're really good about reaching out to me as well. Either visiting me here or calling on the telephone and in more recent years, text messaging with one another. CEO4

The third type of communication for inputs and outputs mentioned by participants was face-to-face interactions. These were highlighted as the most desirable, and most effective, way of interacting with the legislators. This type of interaction was reported as being the most useful method to both build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders:

We out here in West Texas like to do face to face. That's just the way we are. BM3

Boy we're in a great place to be. Great resource and we are a great resource, so, but yeah, just my personal style is just sit down and visit with you about something as fire off an email. CEO3

To me there's nothing as good as face to face. Why? Because when you're face to face it makes more of an impression. I mean if somebody comes and sits across the table with you, is that not a lot more impressive on your mind? BM1

From my standpoint, it's a lot of the face-to-face and it's being me face-to-face with the legislators, just at community meetings or just being out in the public. CEO1

We'll do face-to-face, we'll do breakfast, lunch, dinner, whatever it is in the way of updates, meetings. GR1

The benefit of face-to-face is clearly the ability to have a direct interaction with the external environment. Participants indicated that this type of interaction leads to the building rapport and a deepened relationship with elected officials and their staff. It is the relationship building and the trust that develops that appears to play a significant role in the governmental relations function:

I said, we didn't talk any business at all. That's why they trust me. When we're out we play golf and drink. So it really is about that relationship. CEO1

The participants described three primary means of sending outputs and receiving inputs – telephone calls, email and text messaging, and face-to-face interactions. There is a difference in who receives the bulk of inputs from the external environment based on the size of the college. The inputs, or contacts, are received by the CEO directly at colleges that do not have additional governmental relations staff. While those institutions with GR staff see the bulk of these inputs come to the GR person. Outputs came from CEOs, board members, and administrative staff. Participants described each of the three types of contacts and their perceptions of the relative usefulness of each. There was a clear expression of preference for the use of face-to-face interactions with elected officials in the external environment.

**Research Question 5** - Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?

A key dimension of this research study is any differences that might exist in the operations of the governmental relations function based on the relative size of the college based on its membership in the Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer groups. The structural differences centered on "who is responsible" for governmental relations related to institutional size was discussed earlier in this chapter. To understand this research question a series of questions were asked to better understand how the participants describe the way in which the governmental relations function operates.

CEO participants at each peer grouping indicated that they were involved in the operations of the governmental relations function. The presidents and chancellors described different levels of interaction with the external stakeholders related in some

respects to the size of the college's legislative delegation. The largest colleges have state house delegations that ranged from five at Del Mar College to seventeen total members at DCCCD. The two smallest institutions have significantly smaller delegations with three at Midland College and two total at Panola College. This leads to two key notions – 1) CEO direct interactions with legislators at the two largest colleges are strategic and less personal in nature, and 2) those at the two smaller colleges are more personal in nature.

The participant CEO's at DCCCD and San Jacinto reported that they have interactions with legislators but that these tended to be transactional in nature. Given the sheer size of the state legislative delegation this makes some sense. These CEOs describe interacting on a personal basis with members but seeking to do it in the most strategic manner as possible to manage the relationship. One chancellor noted:

But I do think it's the relationships and it is knowing that they can trust us and that we'll get them correct information and that's one of the things I see as being asked as a resource now, because they know we'll get them the right information.  
CEO1

The descriptions at these larger colleges tended to emphasize the need to build coalitions within the larger community and the CEOs viewed their roles as advancing the colleges needs within the external environment:

It's not only engaging elected officials, but building allies with other likely minded folks and groups and organizations and companies to help us achieve our goals, which are always for the greater good. CEO1

College presidents at the two smallest institutions described a much more personal and intimate relationship with elected officials. Given the much smaller communities they serve, and the size of their state house delegations, it is clear they spend a great deal of time maintaining rather than constructing these critical

relationships. Often this is done directly in the community in daily interactions: as related by one president:

There's a little harvest café over here, I don't know if you know where it is. But that's my favorite watering hole because I swing by there and get a cup of coffee when I come to work every morning. Invariably, I have 5, one-minute meetings while doing that. Invariably. Because I'll see them [legislator], the judge or I will see the superintendent of schools or I will see one of our major private sector partners. CEO3

Another small college president when asked to describe how interactions take place with the state representative given that the community is small enough that the legislator does not live in the community said:

It is not an issue with our state representative. Gosh it's, he's a frequent visitor to the Rotary Club, or to the Lion's Club and as I mentioned his mother-in-law serves on our Foundation Board. We're Facebook friends, that's not something that I mentioned before, but we'll communicate through Facebook. CEO4

The use of social media such as Facebook may be a way of connecting to legislators in a more personal way without direct face-to-face interactions. This could be especially true in smaller communities where the legislator is separated by geographic distance from the community and the college.

Board members at all five case colleges described being involved governmental relations efforts. Most discussed informal efforts to build and maintain relationships with elected officials. Those at the larger colleges tended to describe interactions that occurred in informal settings. At times these interactions with state legislators are unscripted:

I was so lucky, I got out on the plane and here comes this guy and he took the seat right next to and it was State Senator Mike Jackson and I needed to talk to him. And our plane was delayed going to Austin about 20 minutes and I just made my pitch. Hey, I'm not opposed to doing it every opportunity that you get, you know? BM1

Participants did discuss the unique nature of their role in governmental relations given the fact that they are elected officials themselves and share constituents in the community. In effect these relationships are viewed as peer-to-peer:

I don't think it's so much our relationship with that elected official but the elected official's knowledge of our relationship with the community. Because we're all elected in the community, okay? We aren't appointed by the governor. Every community college board person runs for election. BM1

The governmental relations staff at DCCCD, Del Mar College, and San Jacinto reported being very involved in the operations of the function. This is a distinctive from the two smaller institutions where the CEO and board members are solely responsible for the operations of governmental relations. Given that much of the operations have been delegated to these staff it is clear that they shoulder much of the operations of governmental relations at their respective colleges:

I'm building the data; I'm building the research and the communication pieces. Very seldom does one of us go to Austin during session, when we both don't go. GR2

This includes not only the operations of the governmental relations function to build the outputs/messages but also to manage relationships with both legislators directly and members of the their staff:

You know when you're primarily doing the relationship management of your own delegation; we have about 17 members of our Dallas County delegation at the state level and about 6 at the federal level. You've got to do it in different ways depending on if they're the state or federal. The state side we see them in the district. We'll get them out on campus, do the traditional things that you do with them. They're oftentimes wanting to do events, do town hall meetings, do issue specific events at our colleges, use our facilities. GR1

These governmental relations professional are often working in the larger community to build the coalitions and goodwill towards the institution. As one GR staffer described:

Actually your members [legislators] are seeing you not just in an education role, they're seeing you with the economic development group, they seeing you with the chamber, they're seeing you with the city in your own type of thing. GR1

The participants described varying roles in the operations of the governmental relations function. There does appear to be differences based on institutional size related to the operations of GR across the CEOs, board members, and administrative staff with governmental relations responsibilities. The differences can be traced to the size of the community served by the college and the size of the legislative delegation. As the institution grows in size and complexity it appears that it is more likely that the GR operations becomes more diffused through the organization and the interactions become less personal in nature. At all size levels of institutions both the board members and college CEOs carrying out the GR operations, but at three larger colleges GR staff augments the operations.

### ***Themes***

Three themes emerged from the coding and inductive analysis of the interview data in light of the archival and observational data that seemed to describe most effectively the structure and function of the governmental relations efforts at five Texas community colleges. These included: (1) the college CEO has ultimate responsibility for the governmental relations function, (2) the governmental relations function serves as a conduit across boundary between the internal college system and external political/policy system, and (3) the essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political/policy system.

These themes represent issues that were consistently identified and/or highlighted by college CEOs, board members, and administrators in interviews and researcher's

notes. The themes emerged after a lean initial coding process took place based on five codes grounded in the research questions. The themes that arose were in vivo in nature, in that that they came from the words used directly by the participants in interviews. Additionally, the first theme was recurrent in the organizational charts retrieved from the five college Websites.

**The college CEO has ultimate responsibility for governmental relations:**

Regardless of institutional size the office of the college CEO has the primary responsibility for the governmental relations function. Participants all pointed to the college president or chancellor as bearing ultimate responsibility for carrying out the governmental relations function. Several colleges have board members that are more active in the GR function, while others less so. The largest three colleges in this study have professional staff assisting them in the governmental relations function and the two largest colleges also either currently have, or have had, external lobby assisting them in GR at the Federal level. Regardless of these differences all five colleges clearly expect that the institution's CEO is responsible for governmental relations activities.

**Governmental relations function serves as a conduit across system boundary:**

The five colleges in this study structure their governmental relations efforts as key conduit of inputs/outputs between the institution and the external policy environment. The key function being responsiveness to elected officials and policy makers. All five colleges in this study utilize the governmental relations function as the key means by which they seek to monitor the external political/policy system and respond to any inputs sent across the system boundary. As one board member indicated about interactions with legislative offices:

And we'll be very in tune to who they are, and so we develop that dialogue with those offices and the staff people. Many of the senators and the reps use their staff to filter things and we know that. And it's true not just in education but in many areas, so we try to like to know who's the chief of staff, and who is the legislative guy, and the education gal ... so we develop a communication with them. BM3

This can mean a full range of responses to requests and inputs from legislators:

It comes through my office; we'll get a request. If they're wanting to do it more, sometimes I'm setting up events that we will ask them to come to and then again it's just as simple as they'll come speak to a government class. So yeah, I'll coordinate what to do with their staff, to coordinate that with members that are in the district. We'll do face-to-face, we'll do breakfast, lunch, dinner, whatever it is in the way of update, meetings. GR1

**Essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political/policy system:** The key element in serving the external policy environment is the establishment of relationships with legislators through the governmental relations function. All participants discussed the need to cultivate and maintain relationships with external stakeholders as way of insuring that their college responds to policymakers and the state resources they control. College CEOs, board members, and GR staff all described the need to be in the relationship business. One board member who is leading business leader in the community described governmental relations this way:

It's business development. I mean in my world it's called business development and in this world it's called government relations. How are we going to match up the resources with the strengths and the expertise and the connections; opening doors through relationships. BM2

One CEO said that they were part of the community and see their role as building on that fact to assist in the relationships with elected officials:

It comes down to us, and our relationships, and I have really taken a position that I'm part of the community, I've lived here 20 years. I was here before I took the San Jac job, so how do I build on those relationships - with our legislators, those

have been more long term and so we can, I think we can build our own relationships and have that government relationships internally.” CEO1.

## **Summary**

In Chapter 4, the findings from data collection and analyses of this study were reported. I presented analysis, discussion, and quotes aligned with answering each of the research questions of this study. Each of the case study colleges were described in a variety of dimensions including student enrollment and demographics, budget size, college location, and size of state legislative delegation. Participants’ descriptions of how the governmental relations function is organized & structured and how inputs & outputs are managed at each college were recounted using their own voices through excerpts from interview transcriptions.

For this study the overarching, grand tour question is: “How do differently sized community colleges structure the organizational function known as governmental relations and how do college leaders describe the operations of this function?” This chapter answered this question by showing that there are differences in structure of the function based on an institution’s enrollment size which is correlated to larger legislative delegations serving larger communities. The first research question was answered as all participants, and organizational charts, indicated the central role that the office of the institution’s CEO plays in the GR function. Responsibility for the governmental relations function lies within the office of the CEO. The second research question seeks to understand how the colleges structure the governmental relations function. The largest three colleges in the study each have additional staff who support the college CEO in the operations of this function. All five colleges utilize the college president or CEO to update the Board of Trustees on GR issues, but two of the largest colleges also indicated

that staff with GR responsibilities may provide board updates. Each college indicated that the CEO was responsible for communicating governmental relations issues to the internal college community. However the smaller institutions can leverage the reduced number of members of the internal college community allowing for more direct contact / interaction with the college CEO.

The third research question is aimed at understanding if there are differences in the structure of the GR function based on institutional size. The way these institutions structure their governmental relations efforts are impacted by the relative size of the institution's student population. All participants indicated that the institutions' CEO shoulders the ultimate responsibility for this function. However, there are differences in the designating of additional staff to support the function. The three largest colleges all have dedicated governmental relations staff to support the college CEO, while the smaller two colleges have no such staff. None of the five colleges use external lobby staff at the state level. However, the two largest institutions both indicated that they currently (or historically) engage external lobby for assistance in Federal government issues. All five colleges discussed the use of associations at both the Federal and State levels to assist them in managing the GR function. The larger colleges reported using these organizations to supplement their own state GR efforts, while the smaller colleges indicated that the associations serve a more direct role in aiding the CEO in the management of governmental relations.

This variation in the structure of the governmental relations function, related to institutional student enrollment, is correlated to the size of the community in which the college is located. Larger student enrollment is correlated to larger community

populations, while smaller enrollment is correlated to smaller community populations. This relationship is, in turn, directly linked to the size of the state legislative delegation. For the largest institution in this study the legislative delegation is comprised of seventeen elected officials, while at the smallest college the delegation is two elected officials. Having more elected officials means a larger number of possible interactions for the college to manage. The larger institutions accommodate this by having more staff to assist the college CEO in the governmental relations function.

The fourth research question is an effort to understand the colleges' use of inputs and outputs with the external policy environment. The participants described three primary methods of outputs / inputs – telephone calls, email and text messaging, and face-to-face interactions. There did appear to be difference in who receives the bulk of inputs from the external environment based on the size of the college. At the colleges without GR staff, the inputs (contacts) are received by the CEO's office directly. The institutions with GR staff see the bulk of these inputs come to the GR staff member. Outputs came from CEOs, board members, and administrative staff. Participants reported a clear expression of preference for the use of face-to-face interactions with elected officials in the external environment.

The last research question seeks to understand if there are differences in the function of governmental relations efforts based on institutional enrollment size. There does appear to be differences in the operations of the GR function based on institutional size. These differences can be traced to the size of the community served by the college and the size of the legislative delegation. At DCCCD (the largest college in this study) there are three to four staff members to assist in the governmental relations function

managing a state House delegation of seventeen Representatives and Senators. At Panola College only the President manages the GR function however this only suggests managing a state House delegation of two members – one Representative and one Senator.

There appears to be a correlation between the between the size of an institution's student enrollment and the size of the state House delegation. As the college increases in enrollment size, and complexity, it appears more likely that the GR operations become more diffused through the organization in an effort to interact with larger delegations and that these interactions become less personal in nature. At the smaller colleges, the reduced number of state House members indicates fewer overall interactions. Regardless of college size, both the board members and college CEOs carry out the GR operations. However at the three larger colleges GR staff helps support the operations of the function.

In Chapter 5, I will provide a summary of the findings for each of the five research questions. The structure and operations of the governmental relations function at community colleges, as represented in the literature discussed in Chapter 2, will be discussed in connection to the themes of this study. Lastly, a discussion of the implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions of the study will be provided.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations:

This study sought to understand how community colleges organize and structure the governmental relations function. In the previous chapter, the results from the data analysis procedures point to common themes that occur across the respective five cases. These common themes represent the overall findings and indicate how the findings relate back to the case study's grand tour question. This chapter begins with a summary of findings in relation to the five research questions. The themes are compared to the previous research and the conceptual framework incorporated in the study. The sections that follow present implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the study.

### Answering the Research Questions

The following central question guided this study: "How do community colleges across four peer groups structure the organizational function known as governmental relations and how do college leaders describe the operations of this function?" In answering this grand tour question five research questions were posed. Chapter 4 reported the findings in relation to each of the five questions. What follows is a summary of the findings for each of the five research questions.

Research question one asked, "How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?" Answering the question centered around three findings; (1) the centrality of the institution's CEO in the governmental relations function, (2) institutional organizational charts place the college CEO as a direct report to the board of trustees, and (3) other staff

with GR responsibilities are located as direct reports to the college CEO in the organizational charts. Clearly the office of the college CEO is responsible to the board of trustees for the governmental relations activities and if there are other staff involved they report directly to the institution's president or chancellor.

Research question two asked, "How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants' descriptions of how their community college structures the function?" Answering the question centered around three findings; (1) the three largest colleges in this study have additional staff who support the college CEO in the operations of the governmental relations function, (2) at all five institutions, the CEO provides updates to the board of trustees related to governmental relations but at the two largest colleges the GR staff person also provides direct updates to the board, and (3) at each of five colleges, the CEO is responsible for communicating governmental relations issues to the internal college community, however at the smallest two institutions the reduced number of internal college stakeholders allows for more direct contact / interaction with the college CEO. The colleges vary in how they structure the governmental relations function with the enrollment size of the institution (which is correlated to the size of the legislative delegations impacting this structure).

Research question three asked, "Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?" Answering the question centered around four findings; (1) the way in which colleges structure and organize the governmental relations function is impacted by the relative size of the institution, (2) the three largest colleges utilize additional governmental relations staff beyond the CEO while the two smallest do not,

(3) none of the five institutions use external lobby staff at the state level but the two largest colleges indicated that they currently (or historically) engage external lobby for assistance in Federal government issues, and (4) all five colleges use associations, at the both the Federal and state level, to assist in GR efforts but the smallest two colleges in the study use them in a more direct role to support the CEO in governmental relations efforts. There are clear differences in the structure of the GR function at the institutions related to their membership in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's peer grouping. Those in the largest two peer groups have additional staff with GR responsibilities and the two in the Very Large category also engage (or have engaged) external lobby to assist in Federal issues.

Research question four asked, "How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?" Answering the question centered around four findings; (1) colleges identified three primary methods of outputs – telephone calls, emails & text messaging, and face-to-face interactions, (2) there are variations as to who at each college receives the majority of the inputs with larger college reporting the contact coming through the GR staff member while smaller colleges indicating the inputs coming directly to the CEO's office, (3) outputs came from all types of participant – CEOs, board members, and administrative staff, and (4) there is a clear preference for the use of face-to-face interactions with legislators and their staff. Institutional enrollment size is correlated to a larger legislative delegation, which in turn is related to a larger number of inputs/outputs across the boundary between the college and the external system. Outputs to the external legislative

system come in a variety of forms but the preference expressed by all five colleges in this study is to use face-to-face interactions with legislators and their staff.

Research question five asked, “Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?” There is a correlation between the institution’s enrollment size and the operations of the governmental relations function. Answering the question centered around four findings; (1) there are differences in the operations of the governmental relations function based on institutional enrollment size, (2) the differences can be located in the correlation between the enrollment size of the college and the size of the state House delegation, (3) larger colleges have more interactions with elected politicians, which is driven by larger legislative delegations, but these tend to be less personal in nature as compared to the smaller colleges, and (4) at all five colleges, board members also carry out the GR function.

The central, or grand tour, question seeks to understand how the governmental relations function, at five community college in Texas, is structured. The college CEO’s office is responsible to the board of trustees for GR efforts and any additional college staff that assist in the GR efforts report to the institutions CEO. There are variations in the structure - the three colleges, with the largest student enrollment, have additional staff with GR responsibilities and two of them currently, or in the past, engage external lobbyists. This variation in size is the result of a correlation between the size of the student enrollment and the corresponding size of the legislative delegation. Larger colleges are in communities with larger populations, which in turn means larger

legislative delegations. Larger delegations indicate more total volume of inputs/outputs between the college system and its external political environment necessitating larger GR efforts. However, the smaller colleges have more direct relationships with legislators (since there are fewer elected officials in the smaller communities) and the CEOs at the institutions have more direct, personal interactions with a smaller set of elected officials.

### ***Summary of Findings***

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the governmental relations function is structured with the office of the college CEO having primary responsibility for GR while the CEO themselves serve as the central “hub” of all GR activities. The college presidents/chancellors are responsible to their board for all governmental relations activities. However, there are variations in how colleges structure and organize the governmental relations function based on enrollment size. The largest three colleges have other administrators with direct GR responsibilities, which support the college CEO in the critical GR activities. The smaller two institutions rely on the College CEO to manage the GR function. Additionally, the institutional enrollment size impacts how directly connected the CEO is to both the internal college community and external legislators. The presidents at the two smallest colleges have more personal contact with both college staff and with legislators, while the CEOs at the three larger institutions have less direct personal contact with either group. This is a function of the larger enrollment institutions having a greater number of internal college stakeholders and larger state House delegations with more legislators.

The correlation between institutional enrollment size and the increased number of legislators also impacts the volume of inputs and outputs across the boundary between

the college system and its external environment. The larger colleges see a greater volume of these inputs/outputs and often the inputs from legislators goes through the college staff person with GR responsibilities rather than directly to the college CEO. The smaller institutions see less overall volume of inputs/outputs due to a smaller state House delegation and the inputs from legislators goes directly to the college president's office. Across all five cases, participants indicated their preference for face-to-face interactions with legislators. This is driven by their description and perception of the effectiveness of this method in building and cultivating relationships with elected officials.

### **Discussion of the Themes in Relation to Existing Literature**

#### **The college CEO has ultimate responsibility for governmental relations:**

Across all five colleges in this study, it was clear that the college CEO holds ultimate responsibility for the governmental relations function. This was demonstrated in the organizational charts of each of the five colleges and in the descriptions provided by the participants in this study. A large institution participant CEO said, "Well even though Teri [GR Staff person] has it in her title, I'm still the primary, I'm responsible for everything." CEO1. When asked the question of who was responsible for GR at their college a board member at a medium sized institution said, "Steve's our go to guy, he's the President of the college." BM3. A small institution president said, "Yeah. It is me and I think that is an expectation that my board has that I will be the point person for the college." CEO4.

All reported that, regardless of the institution's enrollment size, the president/chancellor was accountable to the board of trustees for GR activities. This institutional structure is consistent with Brown's (1985) research, which found that across

three types of institutions (doctoral universities, comprehensive universities, and two-year colleges) the institution's CEO is the where responsibility for the GR function lies. Brown also found that at two-year institutions, most colleges did not have a dedicated governmental relations professional, but rather relied on the college president to carry out lobbying efforts directly. In this study three of the five case colleges have GR staff other than institution's CEO working on governmental relations activities. However, this ratio can be explained by the relative over representation of two colleges in the Very Large peer group among the five cases. Of the fifty community colleges in Texas, only ten are in this peer grouping. This ratio would not be expected to be the case across all fifty Texas community college districts.

Colleges that have additional staff assisting the institution's CEO in conducting GR activities place the staff members as direct reports to the college CEO. This positioning in the college's organizational chart indicated that the GR staff hold a relatively high position in the institution's organizational structure. Brown (1985) also found that these governmental relations staff typically occupied high-level positions in the organizational structure (pg. 88). Brown's study found that the type of institution dictated how the governmental relations efforts was organized and managed, with the more complex doctoral institutions placing more emphasis on GR activities. Clearly this study found a similar pattern in that the colleges with larger enrollments structured the GR function differently than those are smaller in enrollment size. As a GR staff person at one of the colleges in the Very Large peer group indicated:

Sure, so that is primarily my responsibility at the direction of the Chancellor of course. But the design and the execution, the day-to-day pieces are my primary responsibility. GR1

Lesse (1983), in a study that examined the relationship between university presidents in Texas and the state's legislature, recommended that each university president appoint a staff member to coordinate the governmental relations efforts. Lesse further recommended that each president in their roles as CEOs seek to increase efforts to communicate with legislators. The three largest community colleges in this study did appoint someone to assist the CEO in the GR function. All five college CEOs also reported efforts at communicating with legislators as being a key activity to ensure an effective governmental relations function.

**Governmental relations function serves as a conduit across system boundary:**

Historically the most common image, or description, of organizations was that of a machine. However, organizations can be described as systems that are similar to biological organisms (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968). A key element of open systems theory is the notion of a boundary between the system itself and the external environment (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Moving across this boundary are inputs from the external environment to the system and outputs from the system to the external. It is this flow across the boundary, which is essential in understanding the interactions between the system and its environment. Research question four of this study seeks to understand how college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the college system to its external political/policy environment. Certainly participants indicated that such inputs/outputs do flow across a boundary and the governmental relations function is where the colleges locate this flow of signals related to elected officials and the political environment. It is the GR function that serves as a conduit for these inputs/outputs to move between the college system and the external environment.

Birnbaum (1998) proposed a model of institutions of higher education as cybernetic organizations. He contended that the equilibrium of such a system is accomplished by the use of cybernetic controls, which can be understood as a simple thermostat, which is self-correcting through a feedback loop. The governmental relations function at community colleges can be viewed as a mechanism that responds to inputs from the external political environment and sends outputs back across the system boundary in an effort to ensure that the college system maintains equilibrium. Both Birnbaum (1998) and Weick (1976) pointed to the key role this cybernetic mechanism plays in attempting to reduce uncertainty for the organization. This is an ongoing process that is iterative in nature, as the college constantly monitors the external political environment using its governmental relations function.

It is important to understand that the conduit provided by the governmental relations function at community colleges is not primarily focused on solely receiving inputs and adjusting the organization to equilibrium. Community colleges send signals to the external environment for a variety of reasons. Participants described sending outputs or signals related to the institution's ongoing activities but also to communicate institutional needs such as state support for additional funding and policy changes. This communication process of sending outputs is how Milbrath (1960) described the lobbying process itself. At its core, Milbrath argued that lobbying is essentially a communications process whereby a sender transmits a message to a receiver. For the participants, the sending of outputs are undoubtedly attempts to provide ongoing communication signals in an effort to positively influence the outcomes for the institution. The literature supports the notion of such lobbying efforts by institutions of

higher education as a critical function to ensure the long-term success of public institutions (Murray, 1976; Cook, 1998; Thelin, 2004). As one college CEO described ongoing governmental relations efforts with legislators and staff at the state Capitol:

So we go up there [state Capitol] just to tweak the momentum, it's kind of like a pottery wheel, you know, we build all that momentum going into the [legislative] session, and during the session, we just go up there and hit that wheel, hit that wheel, make sure that it's still going. Just by touching it and saying, "look, these are still very important things" and we'll remind staffers where the momentum is and where the momentum is gaining and where it's not. CEO2

It is the nature of the governmental relations function to serve in this role of a medium across which communications flow:

If I ran into Tom [state representative] at the restaurant and he'd say, "Hey, I've got something coming up, I'll give you a call next week or I'll have my staff contact Steve [college president] or, you know whatever".... That's the conduit, that's more often than not. BM3

This study demonstrates that, for the five colleges, the governmental relations function serves as a conduit, or communications channel, by which messages cross the boundary in both directions – from external policy environment to college system and from the college system back to the external policy environment.

**Essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political/policy system:** The governmental relation function, and lobby activities that are essential to its success, are anchored in a communications process (Milbrath, 1960). According to Glade (2011), a critical notion underlying successful lobbying efforts is the capacity to build sincere and personal relationships with legislators and elected officials. Without this vital effort at building relationships, messaging to the external environment is likely to be less effective. Murphy (2001), in a survey of more than one hundred governmental relations professionals, also found that the two most

effective lobbying methods were to communicate the arguments and messages personally to legislators. Participants describe the importance of developing and sustaining relationships with legislators as a key strategy in the success of the governmental relations function at their institutions:

But I do think it's the relationships and it is knowing that they can trust us and that we'll get them correct information and that's one of the things I see as being asked as a resource now, because they know we'll get them the right information.  
CEO1

In Texas, Avery (2012) conducted a comparable study of Texas, and several other states, seeking to understand the relationship between universities and legislators. Avery found that (similar to Lesse, 2011 and Wolf, 2004) specific keys to the success in an effective governmental relations function included the president and governmental relations staff working at maintaining a robust and quality relationship with elected officials. Garcia (1995) researched one Texas university system's governmental relations efforts in an attempt to understand the GR function and how such efforts achieve success. He argued that the comparative success for governmental relations at institutions of higher education must center on detailed goal setting and planning, but are ultimately successful when close relationships with key policy makers are developed and maintained. This allows for the messages across the system boundary to flow in the most effective manner.

Cohen & Brawer (2002) argued that community colleges interact with their external environments through a mixture of channels such as workforce boards and local business entities, primary and secondary education institutions, and university partners. The colleges use cybernetic controls, as described by Birnbaum, in an effort to respond to attention cues from the outside environment and to build relationships that help support

the institution's needs. Successful GR efforts at effective communications outputs should also focus on developing relationships with other external community and business stakeholders. These other stakeholders can serve as effective channels to deliver key lobbying messages. Murphy (2001) argued that institutions of higher education should seek to use specific influential constituents to carry messages to policymakers.

Participants described the need to not simply develop relationships with legislators but also engaging members of the local community in an effort to build coalitions around each college's needs:

So the governmental relations piece is really essential in both building the relationships we need in order to steer policy in a very positive direction and for meeting those needs and for engaging others around us in a like cause. CEO1

Participants at the five colleges described the importance of relationship development in effective governmental relations efforts.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study help increase the understanding of the ways in which the governmental relations function at community colleges is organized structured and understood. Through extensive review of the literature and interviews with community college board members, CEOs, and governmental relations staff, this study identified how these institutions organize and understand the structure of the governmental relations function at their college. All five colleges recognize the importance of governmental relations although there was variation in how the function is structured based on student enrollment size.

This study found that the office of the college CEO has the primary responsibility for the GR function. However, there are differences in how colleges organize and

structure the governmental relations function based on student enrollment size. Colleges with larger student enrollment have additional staff (other than the CEO) with GR responsibilities. If a college grows in student enrollment, consideration should be given to assigning additional staff to assist the college CEO in the function. As mentioned in Chapter 2, research at the university level indicates a similar trend whereby larger institutions are more likely to have dedicated governmental relations staff (Lesse, 1983; Brown, 1985; Cook, 1998). To be effective, colleges must recognize that larger legislative delegations require sizeable GR efforts that seek to ensure political leaders can send inputs to institution and in return receive outputs in a responsive and efficient manner.

Another implication for practice is connected to smaller community colleges. Individuals who aspire to be college presidents at smaller institutions should appreciate the magnitude of the governmental relations role they will play. Such individuals will be called upon to shoulder most of the GR function at these smaller enrollment institutions. Also, smaller colleges should recognize the importance of the institution's CEO having skills and abilities in the area of governmental relations. Any position announcement for a president should emphasize this skill set. Both candidates for such positions, and the institution seeking to hire a president, should work to construct professional development activities to develop GR skills, which will benefit the president and the institution.

Lastly, participants at the smaller two colleges described using associations in support of their governmental relations efforts. This was true at the federal level with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and at the state level the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC). Given the importance of GR for

community colleges it is important that associations, such as these, work to better understand how best to support CEOs at smaller colleges with successful governmental relations activities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on how community colleges organize and structure the governmental relations function. The effectiveness of governmental relations at impacting state policy and funding for community colleges was not examined. As a result, future research examining the effectiveness of the GR function is suggested.

For this study the case colleges were limited to a single state. It is suggest that future research examine the organization and structure of the governmental relations function at community colleges in other states. This would be helpful in determining if the findings of this study are translatable to other states including in states where board members are appointed rather than elected. An interesting dimension of such research could also focus on possible variations in GR structure at community colleges in states with different state government structures. Also, investigations that examine state variation in the GR function at community colleges could look for variations based on differing state community college systems. In Texas, each community college is an independent institution while other states have more vertically integrated community college systems.

Since this study was limited to college trustees and administrators future investigation is warranted that examines the perceptions of legislators, and other elected officials, of community college governmental relations efforts. Such research could investigate not only the views of political leaders on the structure of GR efforts, but also

on their perceptions of the relative effectiveness of governmental relations activities. Also, such research might examine if legislators view the GR efforts of community college differently than the efforts of public universities. It would be interesting to better understand the perspective of those that are the targets of the governmental relations and lobbying efforts of community colleges.

Given the critical role of the college president in the governmental relations function, additional research is recommended that would examine how college CEOs perceive his/her effectiveness in the GR function. Such analysis could seek to understand the strategies CEO incorporate if they discover that they are more, or less, effective at governmental relations. It would be of value to investigate how college CEOs develop the skills and abilities necessary to coordinate the governmental relations function.

Lastly, it would be of relevance for additional research to be conducted on the specific types and uses of outputs/inputs. This study found the prevalence of telephone calls & text messages, emails, and face-to-face meetings as means of communicating with the external policy environment. Participants reported a preference for face-to-face meetings as a way of enhancing relationships with elected officials. It would be interesting to examine the relative effectiveness of all of these means of communications. Also, several participants described the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as new ways of interacting with elected officials. Future research on these new tools could add value to the overall literature on governmental relations efforts.

### **Summary**

This multiple case study set out to examine how five community colleges in Texas organize and structure the governmental relations function. Community colleges in

general, and specifically Texas community colleges, warrant research at this point in time. Community colleges now enroll half of all students in the United States and have become the largest sector of higher education in Texas, enrolling nearly 55% of all students in public higher education in the state. Meanwhile, funding from the state has shrunk over the past several decades, while tuition rates and local property taxes have risen. This means the state's community colleges are struggling to fulfill their mission of access and affordability while facing stifling budget constraints and increased demand for services. Given these pressures, it is critical that community colleges in Texas utilize a governmental relations function. Community colleges use this GR function in an attempt to communicate institutional needs and to influence policy decisions of the state legislature.

As demonstrated in this study, responsibility for governmental relations at community colleges rests with the institution's CEO. A key finding of this study is that there are differences in how colleges structure the governmental relations function based on institutional enrollment size. This variation in student enrollment size is correlated to the size of the community in which the college is located. Communities with larger populations correlate to larger enrollment at the community college. Colleges with larger student enrollments have additional staff to assist in the GR function, while colleges with smaller enrollments rely upon the CEO for governmental relations. There were also differences, based on the large size of the state House delegations, related to the functions of governmental relations. More state House members indicated more volume of interactions with external elected officials. All participants in this study described using

similar messaging tools to communicate with elected officials although there was distinct preference for the use of face-to-face interactions with external stakeholders.

The researcher found three common themes across all five colleges: (1) the college CEO has ultimate responsibility for governmental relations, (2) the five colleges in this study structure their governmental relations efforts as key conduit of inputs/outputs between the institution and the external policy environment, and (3) the essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political/policy system. These common themes represent the perceptions of selected community college leaders.

The current administration in Washington, DC has put forth an initiative calling for “free” community college for all Americans. For such a sweeping proposal to advance, the governmental relations function will be critical in communicating to elected policymakers the impact of community colleges. Also, given the constraints on state funding, it is unlikely that community colleges will recover the declines in funding over the past decade. Because of this reality the governmental relations function will be important to ensure that community colleges maintain current levels of funding. This study has added to the literature on the topic of governmental relations at community colleges, however the need is obvious for continuing research on this critical function.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

**Research Question 1 (RQ1)** - How is the governmental relations function represented in the organizational chart or other documents of the community college?

**Interview Questions Related to RQ1:**

- Who within the organizational structure has the primary responsibility for directing and carrying out this function?
- How many staff members are included in the governmental relations function?
- What is the structure of the reporting lines for this function?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2)** - How is the governmental relations function represented in the participants' descriptions of how their community college structures the function?

**Interview Questions Related to RQ2:**

- Describe how the governmental relations function is integrated into internal college operations and communications.
- Describe how the person, or persons, responsible for the governmental relations function interacts with internal college stakeholders.
- What type of information is provided by the governmental relations function to the college community?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3)** – Are there differences in the structure of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on Texas community college peer group membership?

**Interview Questions Related to RQ3:**

- If there is a staff person other than the college CEO responsible for the governmental relations function, do they provide updates/reports directly to the board of trustees?
- Does your college use external governmental relations/lobbyists? If so, how are these individuals incorporated into the college's governmental relations function?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4)** – How do college leaders describe the use of outputs/messages from the institution to the external political/policy environment?

**Interview Questions Related to RQ4:**

- Describe the types of contact methods (face-to-face, phone calls, email, letters, etc.) used to interact with legislators. Who is responsible for making the contacts, or responding to legislative requests?
- How many such contacts are during a legislative session? How many during a legislative interim?
- Describe how the college manages requests from legislators and their staff.
- Describe how your college attempts to influence state funding and policy issues through lobbying.

**Research Question 5 (RQ5)** - Are there significant differences in how college leaders describe the operations of the governmental relations function between the colleges based on the categories of Texas community college peer grouping?

**Interview Questions Related to RQ5:**

- Describe how information flows up the institutional reporting lines from key staff to college CEO regarding governmental relations issues.
- How frequently is the board of trustees provided updates related to governmental relations issues?

## APPENDIX B



December 3, 2014

Steven Johnson  
Department of Educational Administration

Brent Cejda  
Department of Educational Administration  
141C TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20141214465EX

Project ID: 14465

Project Title: The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges

Dear Steven:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt, category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 12/03/2014.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

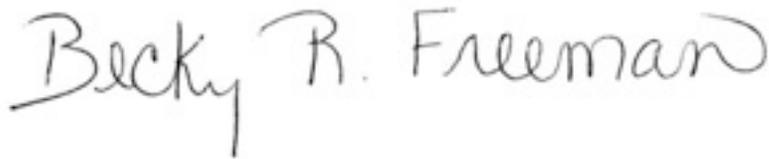
- \* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- \* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- \* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other

finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;  
\* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or  
\* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Becky R. Freeman". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

**Title of Research:**

The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges

**Purpose of Research:**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the ways in which five Texas community colleges organize and structure the governmental relations function.

The methodology will involve personal interviews with 2 to 3 persons from five community colleges in Texas. Participants will include each College President/Chancellor, the chair of the Board of Trustees, and any administrators charged with governmental relations duties. Interviews are scheduled for one hour (60 minutes) and will take place at the respective participant's institution. The location of the interview will take place in a private location on the campus to minimize interruptions.

Individual interviews will create opportunity for each participant to elaborate on personal perspectives of the institution's organizing and structuring of the governmental relations function. As these stories unfold, the researcher will take notes, audio record each session (with permission), and then engage in the process of coding the data and interpreting its content. It is expected that selected themes will emerge from the data sets coming from the participants at each of the five institutions. Varied perspectives also might surface and therefore an inductive approach to analysis will be used (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative research gives a researcher an opportunity to dig deeper into a topic and uncover information not commonly exposed by quantitative approaches, because the process allows participants to expand on specific thoughts or ideas and provide examples (Hatch, 2002). A qualitative approach was selected for this research because it will enable the researcher to better understand how community college leaders describe the organization and structure of the governmental relations function at these important institutions of higher education. By examining this function the researcher hopes to better understand how these critical public educational organizations seek to balance institutional goals with the pressures placed

upon them by legislative and policy environments.

The findings of this research project will be uncovered through a process of examination with patterns and themes identified by the researcher. These findings will help to provide a better frame to understand of how different sized community colleges systematize their interactions and communications with their policy/political external environments and external actors, as well as how they gather and provide information to internal sub-systems. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998).

**Risks and/or Discomforts:**

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research for you as a participant.

**Benefits:**

The benefit of this study is to provide insight into how different sized community colleges structure the governmental relations function. The following are possible benefits from this research project.

1. The results of this study will add to the body of literature but will also be of significance to community college presidents and chancellors, college trustees, and governmental relations professionals as they seek to understand how this critical function is structured and understood at these critical institutions.
2. This study will examine any variations between varying types of community colleges to understand if they have developed differing structures and organizations for the governmental relations function.

**Confidentiality:**

Your confidentiality will be maintained through limiting the contact of key information to only the primary researcher. The institutions included this research will be named in study. Also, your identity as a participant (name and position at institution) in the study will be included with your consent (see the final page of the Informed Consent Form). Audio tapes/digital files will be used for verbatim transcription and notes taken to augment the data and provide additional researcher perspective and reflection. Notes and transcriptions will be re-read to ensure accuracy and transcriptions will be distributed to you for verification of the contents.

The researcher will code the material and summarize the results. To verify the coding process used with interview transcripts, the researcher will also ask several other researchers to review the coding from a transcript to check for agreement (Creswell, 2007). The Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin is located in the same city as the researcher. At least two peers in this program will be asked to conduct this review of the coding. The transcripts of the interviews will be held in the

primary researcher's office, in a locked file cabinet, for a year after the study and then destroyed. The audio tapes/digital files will be destroyed/deleted immediately after transcription is complete.

All results from the research will be reported in a dissertation: *The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges*.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**

You may ask questions regarding this research prior to participation and any time during the research process. You may also contact the primary investigator at any time: office phone 512-476-2572, or cell phone 512-468-5245. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965 or [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu).

**Compensation:**

You will receive no compensation for participating in this research study.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Withdrawal will not adversely impact the your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Your participation or withdrawal from this research will in no way jeopardize your relationship or employment with your college. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your interview and participation in this study is completely voluntary.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this informed consent form to keep.

**Signature of Participant:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of research participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

By checking, I agree to be audiotaped

**Name and Phone number of investigator**

Steven Johnson, M.P.Aff., Principal Investigator  
(512) 468-5245 or (512) 476-2572

**Identification:** By checking the box as indicated and signing below I consent to being identified in the final research by name and title at my institution.

By checking this box I agree to be identified by name and title in the results of this research

---

Signature of research participant

---

Date

## APPENDIX D

### Presidential Participant Solicitation Phone Script

President/Chancellor \_\_\_\_\_:

I'm calling to solicit your participation in my dissertation ("The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges"). I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Educational Studies Program at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, and my major area of study is Educational Leadership and Higher Education.

My research is focused on understanding how community colleges structure and comprehend the function of governmental relations.

By focusing on how these two-year institutions perceive and describe subsystems, which serve to monitor and interact with their external policy environments, this study will add to the knowledge base of higher education governmental relations.

I'm seeking your participation in this study because of your position, experience, and knowledge of governmental relations at your institution.

To gain this insight, I would like to conduct an in-person interview with you at your institution, which will take no more than one hour. Your participation will help provide critical information related to the structure and organization of the governmental relations function at \_\_\_\_\_ community college.

Your identity, and that of your institution, will appear in the study.

An "Informed Consent Form" that explains this further will be provided via U.S. Mail to you prior to the actual interview. Further, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interview for this study to ensure its accurateness.

I would also ask that you recommend any staff member at \_\_\_\_\_ community college that has governmental relations responsibilities, as well as a member of your board of trustees (preferably the board chair) so that I might seek their insights into governmental relations efforts at your institution. After your recommendation and permission I will seek their participation in the study through an in-person interview.

## APPENDIX E

### Participant Solicitation Email

Subject: Support for Dissertation Research

Date: xx/xx/xxxx

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Steven Johnson. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Educational Studies Program at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln...my major area of study is Educational Leadership and Higher Education.

I am writing to solicit your participation in my dissertation ("The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges").

My research is focused on understanding how community colleges structure and comprehend the function of governmental relations. Meaningful research has been produced in connection to the lobbying or governmental relations function at universities and four-year colleges, but there is little such research on the same function at two-year community colleges. By focusing on how these two-year institutions perceive and describe subsystems, which serve to monitor and interact with their external policy environments, this study will add to the knowledge base of higher education governmental relations.

President/Chancellor \_\_\_\_\_ recommended I contact you in an effort to seek your participation in this study because of your position, experience, and knowledge of governmental relations at \_\_\_\_\_ community college. To gain this insight, I would like to conduct an in-person interview with you at your institution, which will take no more than one hour. Your participation will help provide critical information related to the structure and organization of the governmental relations function at \_\_\_\_\_ community college.

Your identity, and that of your institution, will appear in the study. An "Informed Consent Form" that explains this further will be provided via U.S. Mail to you prior to the actual interview. Further, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interview for this study to ensure its accurateness.

Approximately 3 days from now, I will call you to answer any questions you may have, and discuss your participation in this research. I look forward to learning of your experiences in governmental relations at \_\_\_\_\_ community college.

Sincerely,  
Steven Johnson

**APPENDIX F**

## Confidentiality Agreement

## Transcriptionist

I, \_\_\_\_\_ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Steven Johnson related to his/her research study on the researcher study titled: The Organization and Structure of the Governmental Relations Function in Community Colleges: A Case Study at Five Texas Community Colleges

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Steven Johnson.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Steven Johnson in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

### Coding Guide

#### Johnson dissertation coding guide for Peer Reviewers

##### **Formal Structure / Responsibility**

- Who is responsible?: Duty, Job, Accountable
- Number of staff involved: Assist, Support, Coordinate
- Reporting lines of function: Board, CEO, Staff

##### **Integration in College Operations**

- Communication methods to internal college community: Email, Town Hall, Video
- Communication methods to external college community: Newsletter, Civic Groups, Video Messages

##### **Differences in Structure Based on Size**

- Number of staff involved: Who is Responsible, external affairs, public affairs
- Staffers other than CEO update/interact with board: Vice Chancellor, Special Assistant
- Board involvement: Interaction with Legislators, Interaction with College Staff, Interaction with Board Members
- Use of external lobby: State Legislature, Federal, TACC, CCATT, AACC, ACCT

##### **Operations Based on Size**

- Frequency of board updates / discussions: How many, Board Agenda Item, Workshops
- Management of information to the board: Who is Responsible, Updates, Formal, Informal
- Interactions with external elected officials: Frequency, Meetings, Who has Responsibility

##### **Outputs / Inputs**

- Frequency of contacts with external environment: Volume, Number of Contacts, Legislative Session Years
- Management of legislative members requests: Receiving Requests, Responding to Requests
- Types of contact methods with external legislators and staff: Email, Phone Calls, Text Messages, Face-to-Face, Social Media, Twitter, Facebook

##### **Themes**

- **The college CEO has ultimate responsibility for governmental relations**
- **Governmental relations function serves as a conduit across system boundary**
- **Essential functional role of GR is to cultivate and maintain relationships with external political/policy system**